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**THE  
BROAD RIVER  
REVIEW**

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Volume 41  
Spring 2009

The Literary Review of Gardner-Webb University  
Boiling Springs, North Carolina

## THE BROAD RIVER REVIEW

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The J. Calvin Koonts Poetry Award is given annually to a senior English major at Gardner-Webb University for a portfolio of poetry. *The Broad River Review* Editors' Prizes in Poetry and Fiction are chosen from among all poetry and fiction submissions by Gardner-Webb University students.

The editors would like to thank the Department of Fine Arts for its financial and artistic contribution to the publication of *The Broad River Review*.

The editors would like to apologize to Julia Nunnally Duncan for misspelling her name in the header of her story "French Harp," which appeared in last year's edition of *The Broad River Review*. We would also like to apologize to Terri Kirby Erickson for misspelling her name on the title pages of her poems "Incident on the Train" and "Seventeen" in last year's edition. We have reprinted both of Erickson's poems in the current edition.

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LAUREN QUESENBERRY

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*With You*

When I'm with you  
the world fades away.  
Time stands still  
and I come alive.  
Without restriction,  
absent of rules,  
just you and me,  
together.  
In this moment.  
In this entity,  
Invading all else,  
knocking boundaries  
and barriers.  
Walls between love and life  
and you and me.  
Closing crevices  
and expanding on every  
surface.  
I'm intoxicated by you.

*The Trafficked Child*

She lies there  
crying  
alone  
beaten, bloody, and bruised.  
Her hair  
spread in oily tendrils  
on the sheets  
of a once sacred place  
the bed.  
A symbol of rest and peace  
love and sex  
now a place of  
ruin  
of filth  
and of pain.  
Tears stream  
down stained and scarred cheeks  
precious cheeks  
young and innocent  
no longer so naive.  
Her naked breast  
bare to the world  
vulnerable  
and shamed.  
Her chest heaves  
with the burden  
placed upon her  
forced upon her  
the result of one man's greed.  
Her tiny stomach  
rises and falls

with every breath  
below her hip bones-  
jagged and rough-  
the result of starvation.  
Her thighs  
thin and frail  
come together at the top  
and she is bleeding.  
Her tiny legs  
shake with the sobs  
her toes visibly tremble.  
And she tries to remember  
transcend if all possible  
to a better day  
when her current  
state of being  
wasn't determined  
by somebody's perverseness.  
When she was still free  
to be the child she is.  
When she played house  
ran outside  
and kissed the little  
pink noses  
of precious kittens.  
She wishes to unlearn  
the things she knows.  
Of stolen childhood  
and robbed innocence.  
She will never  
be the same.

LAUREN QUESENBERRY

---

*The Scent of My Mother*

The way you smelled that morning  
Is forever ingrained in my mind.  
The faint aroma of love-making  
Emanating from your chest, neck, your womankind.

I nuzzled to your bosom  
My place of comfort, your source of pride  
From inside you made me, conceived me,  
Dreamed me into life.

One, two, three years old  
Your little girl got big.  
I was not always obedient  
But you gave me the wings to live.

Repeat cuts and scrapes  
On my hands, elbows, and legs  
Freedom broke my shoulder  
But it healed alright I guess.

Never crowding or controlling  
You gave me my fair space  
But always ready to fight for me  
When I beckoned you to that place.

Years went by and people failed  
Left me all alone  
Sitting on my bedroom floor  
I called you on the phone.



It was you I craved  
The sweet faint mother-scent  
Calming me and soothing me  
It was there that I was met.

You nurtured me and loved me  
Taught me how to grow  
I picked it up, head held high  
Then, I was on my own.

You taught me how to love again  
You taught me to show grace  
You gave me everything you had  
You said "baby, run the race."

You are my source of life  
You are my best friend.  
You understand me  
When no else can.

Your mothering oozes through you  
Your blood and your tears  
You carry yourself with all confidence  
You have absolutely no fear.

And the way you smelled that morning  
Is forever ingrained in my mind.  
The faint aroma of love-making  
Emanating from your chest, neck, your womankind.

Today I nuzzle to your breast  
My source of comfort  
Your place of pride  
You are my mother and I, your child.

LAUREN QUESENBERRY

---

*Dance With Me*

I see myself  
a hungry wolf  
dancing in the night.  
Wind beneath the moon,  
fairies and butterflies,  
shards of shining metal and  
chunks of living hair.  
Orange and red,  
black and dark.  
Inviting and  
intoxicating.  
Come dance with me.

*Opposing Parallel Pain*

Fear captures my body.  
My firm frame  
left quivering.  
Eyes wet with water,  
I cannot look at you,  
the source of my sadness.  
I'd rather die  
a slow painful  
mental  
relative  
death.  
Because maybe it's not meant to be.  
We're just two different people.  
Two different  
to say goodbye.  
Like parallel tracks  
running opposite directions,  
we never  
ever  
collide.  
Yet we go on living  
loving  
and being one.  
One big mass of  
opposing parallel pain.

SARAJANE BURROUGHS

---

*Daddy*

Every night I dream about the year I turned six.

I watch you work  
on your truck, covered in grease,  
your trusty red rag hanging from your back pocket.  
I ask you about the tools you use and why  
we can't put water in the gas tank.

I watch you teach  
my brothers to play golf and throw a football.  
Every successful toss and hole-in-one  
makes me secretly jealous, that my hands  
are still too small to play along.

I watch you dance  
with my mom around our kitchen table,  
her heels and orange lipstick,  
twirling around at the guidance of your hands.  
I dance on the top of your soiled boots.

I watch you drink  
Your coffee every morning,  
crinkling the newspaper in your hands.  
I drink my milk and pretend  
I can read my books.

I watch you hammer  
and bind our tree house together  
with your bare hands. With every  
clack, clack, clack, of the nail, I think,  
"No one is as great as my daddy."

Every night I dream of the year I turned six.

I watch you kick  
up dust as you swerve your truck  
into our driveway, stumbling out  
wreaking of booze and Wal-Mart perfume.  
I wipe my mother's tears from her eyes.  
I watch you take  
a putter to my brother's back  
because he didn't strike the ball hard enough.  
I cry as you drag the other out of your truck  
by his hair for losing the big game.

I watch you leave  
streaks and bruises on  
my mother's face with your grease  
covered hands. I pretend to sleep  
as you push her into your bedroom.

I watch you fill  
your coffee mug the rest of the way  
with Jack Daniels, telling me,  
"Nothing does the trick, better than half and half."  
I know it isn't half and half.

I watch you hold  
my hips and arms in place  
with your calloused hands.  
You muffle my screams with your chest grunting,  
"No one is as good as Daddy's little girl."

Every night I dream.

*Porch Spider*

Whenever Jen and I both were riding with Dad in the work van, I always ended up sitting on the death bucket between the two front seats. Clutching onto the dirty upside-down container, I tried my hardest not to flail as we bumbled down the road toward the Chinese restaurant. Dad didn't take us out to eat often, only on mine or Jen's birthday, and special occasions like today. I was slightly disgruntled about being on the bucket; I always felt being older was supposed to have its perks. But being the older child in a single-parent family only taught me how to not get my way, hence why I was sitting on the bucket. I was pleasantly surprised at how the van didn't completely smell like sewage on this afternoon. Dad told me he had cleaned it out to make room for Jen's luggage. The van let off a light squeal as Dad pressed the brakes and turned into the Chinese Buffet. Relief flooded out of my mouth through a deep sigh as we parked and I began to fumble out of the white, slightly rusted piece of metal.

"Whoa, my butt was going numb there for second," I commented as I maneuvered out of the van.

"Sorry," Dad said, "Next time we'll put the lawn chair in the middle for ya."

Jen slammed the heavy door shut, "You won't have to worry about that once I leave, though, so there's a positive." Jen's favorite topic of conversation lately had been all of the good things about her leaving. I think she felt guilty moving away, and scared. We went in and ate. I decided I may get a coke instead of the usual; Jen didn't leave for college everyday.

I wanted to look at it pretty badly. That little slip of paper faced down on the table. It was angled slightly to the left of the salt shaker, closer to the napkin dispenser and the soy sauce. The condensation from Jen's glass of water had leaked onto the edge. But looking at the meal ticket was something neither of us girls ever did, never. When Dad got up from his seat to go the bathroom, I placed my fingers on the paper.

"Denni, why do you care?" Jen asked.

"I'm just curious; it's not a big deal anyway," I said. I pulled the bottom corner of the slip of paper up just enough to see the number at the bottom. \$32.47. I didn't say anything or react; I laid the corner down and gave Jen a fraudulent smile. I wasn't curious like that often. I really don't know what came over me in that one minute time span where I had to break my father's only rule when it came to going out to eat. Never look at the check. That was it, that's all I had to abide by, for my father's sake.

Dad walked back to the booth and slid in across from Jen and me. He was wearing his nice sweater, I had just noticed. He was nervous, both of us could tell. Dad and I would be dropping Jen off at the airport after this, and she'd be flying to Nebraska to go to Franklin University, a small school in the middle of nowhere that gave her almost a full ride for softball and academics.

As we were leaving I called the passenger seat like I did every time that we rode together. Both Jen and I were grown, but some things just never change.

"It is my last ride here; you are not going to make me ride on that bucket, Denni," Jen said.

"Yes, ma'am, I am, watch me." Sarcasm dripping from my words.

"Seriously, I am not riding on the bucket of doom, I'm younger, and I should get the seat belt."

Dad chimed in, annoyed at our immaturity, "Just give her the seat Denni. She's leaving."

Once again, 'older' means being grown up enough to give in for the sake of convenience and time. We had a flight to take Jen to anyway. The hour drive in the plumbing van was rough as I battled with the bucket. We had cordial conversation about what Jen was thinking of majoring in, what clubs she might join, and how we were going to miss her (sometimes, I had told her).

After we dropped her off, gave her hugs and left, I kept thinking about that ticket I had seen. It bothered me. It bothered me that I was so bothered. I kept thinking to myself and calculating in my mind that if I hadn't gotten that coke, the bill would have been under \$30.00. I broke the unspoken rule, and I was feeling guilty because of it. On our way back, Dad and I talked about work. About how maybe I should try going back to school, how that upcoming weekend he was going to see

about a used radiator for my car so I wouldn't have to ride everywhere with him. We had this conversation once a week and my car hadn't been working all summer. The ride was normal enough for us, but I couldn't help but notice a state of worry in Dad. His eyes fluttered and shifted like when he was really upset. These are things us girls notice but don't say anything about. I thought about how odd it would be without Jen and decided that was probably the reason for his anxiety.

After Jen had gone to school, I was surprised at how easy it was to adjust to her absence, I missed her a lot, but she was always a phone call away. But after this week, it seemed unfair to me how nothing around the house had really changed. It was still slightly empty and way too small. Jen and I used to make jokes about the size of our home, how you could stand at the front door and see into every room. The television was on the floor across from the couch, his entire *Star Trek* movie series on VHS stacked beside it. I didn't watch much television, especially since the color started to go weird and everything came in shades of red and green. We couldn't afford a new television. Dad didn't care though; he just called it the Christmas edition of *Star Trek* and watched on.

Curled into the corner of the couch, I remembered how my cousin commented on how old the furniture had gotten and how plain the windows were. "You guys should at least put up some curtains to make it feel homey," she had said. I remember thinking to myself mothers pick out curtains; it's not my job to make this place "homey." I don't really remember my mother, as she died when Jen was born, and I always resented people who tried to force me to replace her. I didn't think too much on not having a mother, it just was what it was. I think my Dad thought on it a lot, though he never said anything, I'm just guessing. Jen and I always figured things out eventually, mother or no mother. Nesting and being homey wasn't our thing. Anyways, I personally liked how bare the windows were; it made it easy to look out at the porch. We had two white lawn chairs out there and a ceramic wind chime that Jen had made in high school art class. The porch was by far my favorite place to go and read. I grabbed my book from the coffee table and headed for the front porch. I pressed my hand up against the screen door handle and it stuck like it always did. I poised myself to complain about the door like usual, then I remembered that I was alone in the house. I wiggled the handle, pushed with my body weight and opened the door.



I checked the white lawn chair for dust and decided I didn't care if I got my black dress dirty; hopefully I wouldn't have to wear it again anytime soon. I pulled up the other white chair and propped my feet. It was thick and humid out and the sun had begun to set, the trees across the road were beginning to dim in color. The front porch was nothing more than a slab of cement and an overhang. There were two metal posts that held up the overhang, each with a strip of metal swirling around it for decoration. I stared at my book for a moment, noticing where the book mark was placed. Opening it up, I fanned the chunk of pages to the left in my fingers, the smell of paper wafted into my face, and I realized that every word after that page that I last stopped at would be different. Before that bookmark, my father was alive. After, every word would be changed because he wasn't here anymore.

Everything was different. Everything.

It only took a moment before I noticed it wriggling in midair to my right. Any other time I would have been disgusted. I would have jumped up, done a heebie-jeebies dance, ran into the house, and begged my father to mercilessly smash that nasty spider. Something he would have only done after a little cussing from inconvenience and then a heavy amount of mocking me because I was a sissy. But nevertheless, it would be dead. The dusky light shone on its back and gave it a reddish tint and every time a car sped by the house, it clutched to its thread through the gust of wind that rattled it's half-made home. I curled my entire body into the chair, holding my legs to my chest and setting my chin on my knees. I stared at its fat belly that wobbled from side to side and its sharp legs that pulled and prodded. You could hear a large vehicle coming and when I looked up it was a white work van. It sped by pushing a quick gust of air, gently stirring the wind chime and forcing the spider to brace itself. I watched the van drive on, never knowing that it had shaken the world of this little creature. That shiny white van looked like my Dad's van, but it was much newer and nicer than his, and it was missing the gray pipe and palm tree.

I worked with my dad at Paradise Plumbing. I always thought that was a ridiculous name. I felt ridiculous having to answer the phone "Paradise Plumbing, this is Denni, how may I help you?" Jed the owner wanted me to ask, "How can we make your porcelain palace paradise?" I refused. For some reason, he equated wit and humor with alliteration. I never quite got it.

I hated working there. I had to watch my Dad work fourteen hour days no matter what the weather was like. I had been working there since high school, and in those three years I watched him age what seemed like fifteen years. Icy days stalled his bones and hot days drained him of everything he had. Jed was all for stupid catch phrases, but he wasn't much for treating his employees well. He pushed my dad for all he had physically. He knew my dad would never leave, being a high school drop out who only knew two things: plumbing and raising girls on his own. Jed promised him commission work for years, but we both knew that was bull.

That van had to drive by. I'd been allowing myself to forget it all as I watched the porch spider. Yesterday, the police had stopped and asked me questions about Dad. They asked about his mental health, his self-esteem, and what the past couple weeks had been like. I asked them how likely it was that a grown man and independent single father would share his feelings and self-esteem issues with his daughter. They left it at that, they left that alone all together, thank God. I remembered a conversation we had in my dad's van about two weeks before.

The van creaked and jangled as we turned out of the parking lot of Paradise Plumbing.

"Jen called the other day from college, Denni."

"Really, how's she doing?"

"Good, I guess. She says she misses you and she wishes she could fly out for Thanksgiving. But, you know...money."

"I know," I snapped slightly and looked into the side view mirror. It was cracked in the center and the palm tree reflection was distorted.

"She got that second job." I could tell he was upset, but he was trying to hide it.

"Don't worry, Dad, Jen will be just fine. She won't get behind in school."

"It's not that, Denni. I told her I would help her." He pushed the brakes hard for a red light. They squealed, and all of the equipment loudly shifted around in the back.

"You know," his voice rose, "sometimes I don't understand. I told her I didn't want her take a second job, that I would find a way to help her. Even Jen doesn't think I can provide for my own children!"

We were silent. The squeaking of the van seemed to scream cheap and old as we went down the road. This wasn't new to me, I felt it all the time, the hurt from lack, but I never actually heard my father talk about it like that.

"Denni, I just feel like it's never going to happen. Every time I start to get my head above water, and I feel like I just might make it, it's like a wave comes in and...I just got no chance, ya know? You're my girls. And it's just never enough. It's never enough."

I never looked at him; I stared into the sideview mirror and said, "Jen'll be fine." I never did acknowledge that random metaphor of his failing life. What could I say?

I followed the spider with my eyes as it traveled in an inward spiral on an invisible surface. Every movement it made was full of purpose and precision. It was an artist in that moment. It was so determined and I found myself mesmerized by its obliviousness to me. I thought about how hard he was working...that busy little spider, and I could simply decide right there to end it all myself. All it would take is a flip-flop and some concentration. I realized I was becoming slightly melodramatic, so I opened my book to read. I read and reread the same paragraph as I kept stopping to glance at the porch spider, mostly because it was huge and freaked me out. It was moving around and across now even faster, and I still couldn't see the product of all this scampering.

I remembered one summer in high school when I worked the late shift at the Waffle House. Dad would have to come pick me up at two o'clock in the morning after we were done cleaning. He wouldn't say a word to me; normally he didn't even bother putting a shirt on. When we got back to the house, he would wrestle with the wrench that was clamped where the door handle of the van used to be, hop out of the van with a grunt, and trudge into the house. He would go straight to the couch where he had slept since the time my sister and I were too big to share a room and a bed. Then he'd crash into a dead sleep, before he'd have to wake up for work just a couple hours later. That was a long summer for him; I knew it. One night as I cleaned up and crawled wearily into bed my eye caught a large black spider on the wall. I was stunned, exhausted from the long night, I decided instantly that I could never kill it on my own. So I had no choice.

"Dad," I whispered. "Dad, I need you," I strained, speaking it from a distance, somewhat scared to wake him, but knowing I had to. I could have cried. I could have screamed. I was 16 and completely debilitated by the fear of a small insect. "Dad...Please, I need you!"

I shook him and he woke up, groggy and confused. "M'God Denni, what do you want?"

"There's a spider...in my room"

"You've gotta be kidding me."

Like a bear forced out of hibernation, he growled and grumbled, trudged to my room, and grabbed a shoe from my floor. "Where?" he asked.

I pointed. He slapped the shoe on the wall and turned around. Leaving the room, spider guts still smeared into the wall, he never said a word to me, even when I said thank you. As I turned to my bed I heard his body drop solid on the couch and then there was quiet.

You know, compared to other spiders, the spider on the porch was pretty big in size, but not really in the grand scheme of things. Compared to me it was quite small and because of this I wrestled with the idea of killing it, just for the sake of being bigger and being in control. Why not? That's what life did to my father. The spider was working so diligently to construct its little web; and shaken every once in a while by a passing car, it would continue laboring. I watched it building and scurrying around in the air. The dimming sunlight caused any signs of a web to disappear, but I knew that's what it was working toward. The spider's web: shelter, means for catching food, protection for its young, the spider's livelihood. No wonder every move the spider made was so intentional, its life was dependent on the work of its eight wriggling legs and the strength of its web.

Its existence wasn't too far from my father's. Dad lived, just barely, by the work of his hands. He had humble dreams of sustaining himself, of owning his own plumbing business, "Being his own boss." When we rode in the van in silence, I used to guess the times when he was thinking about it. And usually within five minutes or so he would say something like, "Ya know? One day I'm going to have my own van. It won't sound like crap or have a stupid palm tree on it. And I won't have to be under a know-nothin' like Jed. That idiot couldn't change out a P-trap...but I tell ya one thing, he'd still charge too much for it! You

girls, everybody, one day....you'll see." Sometimes I wondered what it was we would see because he never said, but I guessed he left it vague because he himself didn't completely know.

My head still resting on my knees, my book was clutched under my arm. I pulled it out again to read, but it had gotten too dark since I had first come and sat down. I stared at the pages. Jen's wind chime jangled a little in the wind. In my mind, I heard my father's voice, his frustration with himself, his hopelessness all over Jen's second job. Because Jen knew he would have to take extra nights on-call to help her out. I wished I was in the van with him again, being rattled about in that ugly, top-heavy squeak bucket. I wished I hadn't blown him off when he told me he was drowning in failure. I wished his van would, at that moment, pull into the driveway. But, it wouldn't. I wondered if they had gotten the van out of the bottom of the river yet and how I was going to get to work in the morning. I'd have to use the money I was saving up for school to get a car now. And what about keeping the house? It was hard with Dad and me together to deal with the bills, but now it would just be me.

The wind from the passing cars chilled my cheeks. A small sports car with florescent headlights drove by. The light passed over the spider's web and hundreds of shreds of reflected light revealed what my eyes couldn't see before. The thin lines were uniform and parallel...they were perfect. The concentric spiral was tight and clean. That creation was more than natural ability, it was true skill. It looked strong and proved itself so because the spider continued, unfazed, right through the gust of wind from the speeding car. It was making finishing touches, using its front two sharp legs to pull at the intersections of the silken construction. It was so close to being finished, to settling into its small existence. I was glad I had not killed the spider yet, if only to see its finished work.

Suddenly an urge swelled up within me. I felt consumed by that feeling you get when true injustice has been done. When you want to revert back to childhood and scream at the top of your lungs that it's just not fair. But, now I was old enough to tell myself, "Life's never fair, Denny." That spider would finish its web; it would live out its existence and would never have the ability to feel proud of it, to know it accomplished what it set out to do. I remembered that when I went back into

the house, I would be by myself. Jen wouldn't be able to fly down for another week, then we'd go visit his grave together and I would comfort her like a big sister should. But until then it was all me, continuing on, answering the phones "Paradise Plumbing, this is Denni, how may I help you?"

I wondered if in the last moments that my Dad was driving if he was thinking about his dreams, and I remembered the face he always had when he thought about it. It was never truly full of hope, but more like desperation to be more. I wondered if in his mind, as the river water rushed in through windows, if he was enough. I looked over one last time, the web was really beautiful, and the spider stood still for the first time since I had begun to watch it build. It would be dead if my father weren't already dead. I stood up, grabbed my book, and headed to the front door. Dad would have come out and killed it so I could read in peace; he would have mocked me, but he would have done it. That was enough for me. I grabbed the screen door handle. It stuck.

*Unpacking the Creek*

The bus that I got off,  
exploding into tears,  
floated down the asphalt river  
with its travelers the world over  
in the seat each chose because it was free,  
immigrants like me.

The country I left—  
youth—  
had water running beyond,  
not spurting out of me  
as though I were some fire hydrant  
for kids to gather near and play.

I was a kid,  
knew that language kids know,  
where smiles dammed air,  
still overflowing.

ALLEN SMITH

---

*Nihilist*

I am good at doing nothing,  
like just floating  
in midday sun,  
chores left undone.

I'm good at something—this nothing.  
I've a feeling,  
a strong one for  
the cement poured

to form this pool, warm as my skin  
even winter,  
when I'm afloat  
wildflower snow.



ALLEN SMITH

---

*Trio*

A dead bird, butterfly, pine tree  
all seem lazy  
in their stillness,  
but expressive.

The dead bird is popular now.  
The ants surround  
and carve it up.  
The butterfly

didn't interest. Yellow as yolk,  
its wings still feel  
air, like the tree  
raining needles.

*At the Cracker Barrel*

We took our seats for dinner,  
snuggled up against the wall.  
Just the two of us, and the  
woman in the picture.

Her eyes, resigned,  
fell upon our table.  
She hung there, framed –  
forty years of hard work

heavy on her brow.  
Widowed too late to start anew,  
Still, matted and bound,  
this time by wood and wire.

She stared, water gently pooling  
in the corners of those fixed orbs,  
hoping for one moment of satisfaction –  
one small battle she could win.

I noticed her subtle smile  
and knew that our whole baby carrots  
were not as soft and sweet as hers,  
made with homely hands a hundred years ago.

*Onto the Shore*

The Tennessee was invisible,  
The bridge rose into a sleeping cloud.  
Now a light rain  
and a winter's breeze  
pulls the blanket back.

Halves of the hand-sized mussel shell  
lie face up like two big ears  
listening to the very surf  
that broke its spine.

Augers spilled onto the shore,  
empty of any life  
to drill into the sand.  
Hiding now futile.

Grateful for these deaths,  
a man walks slowly,  
head bent, and  
gathers what he can.

*Rayon City*

It's a real place, alright,  
named after the treasured synthetic –  
stuff that makes the cotton in  
your pants and shirts and dresses  
forget to wrinkle.

Slapped together by the same  
company that made and sold  
gunpowder to North and South  
nearly a hundred and a  
half years ago.

You can taste it near the back  
of the tongue when a gentle  
breeze blows west across the river.  
Your eyes burn just a little. Smells  
like firecrackers, says my son.

TERRI KIRBY ERICKSON

---

*Incident on the Train*

Wearing gold lame shorts  
and a halter top,  
she boarded the train at Harlem.  
Her nails were ten red

hooks curling toward  
her palms, her blonde wig  
askew. Convinced he stole  
her cigarettes,

she argued with a white  
man, four rows up, who refused  
to hand them over,  
claiming he didn't smoke

and "By the way,"  
he said, "you're crazy." She  
replied, "At least I ain't  
no thief."

TERRI KIRBY ERICKSON

---

*Seventeen*

Somehow you never meet the boys  
Who drive convertibles, the ones who breeze  
By you on the highway, doing at least eighty—  
Blond hair rippling like fields of ripe wheat.  
You imagine them pulling into long driveways  
Leading to houses often featured  
In glossy magazines, with swimming  
Pools, gazebos and garage apartments  
For the family chauffeur.

Instead, you meet your best friend's pimply  
Brother, who wears black stretch socks  
With open-toes sandals and sets the cruise control  
On his dad's sedan ten miles below the speed limit.  
He keeps a five-dollar bill pinned inside  
The waist band of his pants for emergencies,  
And buys you a wrist corsage from Wal-Mart  
A week before the prom—a pale orchid  
With brown spots forming near the edges.

So you close your eyes for the first slow dance,  
Imagine your head on a different shoulder, broader,  
More solid—his wind-whipped hair just grazing  
The collar of a single-breasted dinner jacket.  
He whispers a line of Rilke in your ear, tells you  
That you are all the gardens he has ever gazed at,  
Longing—not how he's decided for sure,  
To attend community college since  
It's so much cheaper and closer to home.

TERRI KIRBY ERICKSON

---

*A Mother Laments Her Daughter's Tattoo*

She remembers the perfect flesh of her newborn child,  
cell after cell of flawless skin, soft and pink as rose petals.

The ingratitude of it, she thinks, to mar that perfection  
with mossy green ink, the color of mold creeping

up a wall, when soon enough the years will crease  
and fold it, dry its dewy surface like wringing a wet

sponge. They are obscene, these man-made markings  
the blatant vandalism of a pristine creation. It is graffiti

in a sanctuary, shoe prints on a wedding gown. To pay  
for such defilement, to sit docile for redecoration,

is an act of self-destruction she cannot comprehend but must  
accept—although forgive me, she says, if it takes a while.

*Madeline Parmenter*

Mrs. Madeline Parmenter walked with her head held high despite being the wife of a drunk in a town small enough to notice. She took the short, shallow

breaths of a woman wearing a whalebone corset and seldom spoke—afraid her thoughts would tumble out like acrobats, once she opened her mouth.

Due to the capricious nature of her husband's moods, she never invited company to the house, and they had no friends. So far, he managed to keep a steady

job because it's tough to buy booze without a salary—but Madeline hadn't worked in years as her concentration waxed and waned, depending on what

happened at home the night before. Her husband was never violent—used words instead, like X-Acto knives, cutting her into confetti-sized pieces.

She was often seen watching the road from her living room window, her face pinched as pie crust—waiting for the cavalry, some said, without a shred

of hope they'd get there in time. The neighbors felt sorry for her, but what can we do when people won't help themselves? She ought to leave him before it's too late

to find another husband, they whispered, as if Madeline Parmenter would ever place her tender psyche in any man's hands again, over her cold, dead body.



*Salesman*

Maybe death is like a door-to-door salesman.  
Not the eager boy with the spit-shined shoes,  
but a middle-aged man in a brown Derby  
hat. His tie is egg-stained and crooked,  
shirt frayed at the cuffs. Streaks of dust  
cover his worn-out loafers, lucky pennies  
lost on the road. He carries a battered  
briefcase. You know it's empty as soon  
as he sits down, smiles at you from across  
the room—a sad smile, filled with regret.  
You lament the curlers in your hair  
or the grass-stained jeans, hastily pulled  
on when the doorbell rang. Had you known  
he was coming, you would have dressed  
better. You offer him a cup of coffee  
in hopes he might stay a while, delaying  
the inevitable. He declines, politely,  
and stands up. Taking note of how tired  
he looks, face droopy and creased as an old  
hound dog's, you feel kind of sorry for him,  
for what he's there to do, but sorrier  
for yourself—unless you're very sick  
or in pain. Then you might be ready—  
relieved, in fact, which makes it easier  
on both of you. But don't feel bad. Most  
people squirm in their chairs, consider  
making a run for it, as if it would do them  
any good to run. Or regret opening  
the door in the first place. He might have  
moved on then, to another house. You tell  
yourself this, but you know better, don't you?

*Departure*

I want some peace and quiet.

It's a night without a moon. Summer is over and the rattle of skateboards and the thumping bass of car stereos have faded. I'm standing in the yard with only our house between me and the ocean. From here I can see into the house next door where the renters are staying. The kitchen is bright and the windows are open. It's September, still hot as hell. Inside there's a pale woman with a tight red ponytail, then a towering guy stretching thick-set arms onto the table looking like something's pissed him off. He knocks over a kitchen chair and the clatter of wood cuts into the night. The woman pushes out an arm to back him off and that's when I see a kid cowering at her center.

I don't have to be in that house to know those sounds. By the time you race to the stairs or doorway your heart is running uphill, pounding. You're never fast enough. You never forget the order of sound: the scrape of a chair, the threatening undertones, the dull thud.

The person who screams? That's never the person who's hit. That's the witness.

I can shut my eyes here in my yard because I don't need to see it to know what's happening.

But no, I don't walk over, don't knock at their back door and ask them what the hell is going on. I'm standing outside in my yard at the dark end of the street with only my house and my wife between me and the ocean. You can always hear the ocean. It's the one sound that carpets our lives. But the night is hot and windless and sometimes there's a difference between what you hear and what you know and for all I know tonight the waves could have been swallowed whole by the sand.

I'm not the kind of person who does nothing. I don't ignore what I see. In the yard the shadows cover me and I can watch the neighbors and I can hear Eve inside our houses wiping down kitchen counters and cabinets and pulling along her clinking glass of scotch and ice.

"Robbie," she calls, in a singsong voice, "come insi-iiiiide."

Our daughter died almost a year ago. We've just returned from

a trip meant to take us away from all remaining splinters and now Eve has got to find her own way.

And so here I am. Outside looking for some goddamned peace and quiet when I hear those sounds coming from the neighbor's house.

"That's John Matheson, the visiting ornithologist," a sober Eve told me earlier. "Here to study the bird sanctuary."

"You should sell it," I said. It was a ten acre piece of property worth twenty million dollars and the research project had been arranged while we were away.

"He's here with his wife and a daughter for the year."

"The land is empty now," I said. "He shouldn't waste his time."

"He's from Cornell," she said, snapping open the blinds. "World renowned. He'll figure something out."

Now light spills into our side yard from our open kitchen window. Ice in liquid clinks inside.

I hear the creak of a screen door and the man in the kitchen walks out into his yard, slamming the screen door shut behind him. Matheson stands well away from me, arching his back, stretching, and raising his face to the moonless sky. Our new neighbor walks across his yard, now a wave eddying forward after its crash, inching closer to our house, searching his pockets. His legs disappear in the uncut lawn; he is all trunk and heft. He bends his head and cups his hands to light a cigarette. An orange glow shows his face: thick brow and curly swells of dark hair. I'm completely still. Inside his kitchen, the woman smooths the child's hair—a girl—and carries her out of the room. The bird guy smokes out in the yard and doesn't notice when a light upstairs in his house turns on. He's busy staring at my house. I can still hear Eve clattering through the open window, but I can't see her from where I stand. I don't dare move. He takes two steps closer.

What does he want?

"You lost?" Eve says from inside.

Caught.

The man salutes, cigarette in hand. The screen in the window scrapes open and Eve leans out.

"Hello, neighbor," she chirps. I can hear the slur in her voice. "Are you all settled in?"

"Not yet," he says. "Our daughter had some trouble in her new school."

Eve doesn't talk about kids.

"Ready for your lecture tomorrow?" Eve says.

He walks across the last bit of yard, into the light on the grass coming from our kitchen, and at the window, gazing up into the light, extends his hand. Eve takes it.

"It's about time we met," he says. "I'm John Matheson."

"It's my family's land. People want to buy it to build condos."

"I know." Matheson smokes with his free hand and there is a long silence. His other hand is still with Eve.

"What's your daughter's name?" Eve asks. I'm stunned.

"Sophy."

Eve looks out into the dim yard, directly at me.

"Come inside," she says. "Have a drink and meet my husband."

Matheson walks around to the front of the house. I turn silently just in time to see the upstairs light next door snap off and the woman's face appear in the window. I walk around the back of the house to the ocean, their laughter echoing at my back between the houses in the dark windless night.

The next morning I drive eight miles north of Winter Harbor on the mainland. I like the supermarket in St. George's. No one knows me here. I approach and the automatic doors slide open in welcome, sunlight flashing off the shopping carts inside.

What would Susannah like? I wheel the silver shopping cart up and down the aisles and fill the basket. Ice pops might melt, but Count Chocula would be fine. A Spice Girls coloring book. Chocolate chip cookies, the soft kind.

The market in St. George's is crowded today. It's Sunday. I lift boxes and read labels. I look at the packaging, just remarkable. Bright yellow background and dancing sombreros on taco mixes made in Milwaukee. Steaming chicken noodle soup in a spoon with perfect squares of carrots. In every aisle, I see the same man with a red vest, a supermarket employee. He seems to be following me, aisle to aisle, straightening items on the shelf. There's crispy fried chicken on a clear Crisco bottle—

recyclable! Everything in the world is healthy. Organic. Recycled. I drop hot chocolate mix with mini marshmallows into the shopping cart—four boxes, to stock up for those chilly winter months. In the shampoo and haircolor aisle, boxes of beautiful women toss their glossy heads from side to side.

"Medium Brown," I read aloud. "Golden Brown. Warm Golden Brown and—Espresso?" I look around. The man with the red jacket is staring at me. "Who writes these things? Who buys this?"

A woman behind me laughs.

I put a bottle of dry-eyes baby shampoo in the shopping cart.

"Robbie?"

No one knows me here. But there it is. A hand on my back. It's the woman behind me.

"Julie?"

I haven't seen her in nearly a year. I can't believe I remembered her name. She laughs and nods, a bit nervously. I forget her husband's name. We all went to dinner together once. There is a baby boy sitting in her shopping cart.

"Who's this?" I say, leaning down to look him in the eyes. He's a pork chop, all right.

"Kyle," she says.

Eve and I met Julie and her husband in Lamaze class. "Look how he sits up straight," I say, "all by himself."

"How are you?"

"We're good," I insist. When did I last see Julie?

"And how's Eve?"

Yes, we saw her at Susannah's funeral. I look at the contents of my cart, embarrassed. I explain that Eve is very good, that she's returned to the conservation work she spearheaded years ago, that we just returned from a long, restful trip. "You know how the summer is," I say, "we left the island and returned when the tourists went home."

"I didn't know you shopped out here," Julie says.

"You know how it is," I repeat.

Julie has long, straight hair streaked with blonde highlights and a freckled face like a teenager. She owns a cleaning business and does mostly private residences during the rental changeovers. She stares at me for a long moment. The man in the red jacket, oddly enough, has

stopped all pretense of work and is watching us. He has a gold nametag with ASSISTANT MANAGER in black lettering.

"It's hard enough to deal with people you know," Julie finally says. "I guess strangers would be even worse."

"I like this store," I say, looking down at the crayons and coloring books. "There's a much better selection. Our neighbors, they're from out of town. Eve and I are going to babysit for them today." I am a terrible liar.

Julie looks at the bottle of baby shampoo in the cart. "It was nice to see you, Robbie," she says. She smiles sadly and wheels her cart away. I almost welcome her pity—it's more familiar than the shock of being seen.

"We're doing great now," I say to the man in the red jacket.

"Sir," the manager says, "I've noticed that you keep coming back here, filling shopping carts and leaving them in the aisles."

I stare at him. "What do you mean?"

"We have video cameras here." He looks quietly at me and asks me please, not to come back.

Outside, the northeast wind swells and the stillness of the past day disappears. By the time I drive back to the island, the flags are taut and the cattails are swaying back and forth alongside the road. I park in front of the house. But on the front lawn next door, there she is: the neighbor's daughter. Sophy Matheson. I see her clearly now for the first time. Her pink jacket is unzipped and she is, with intense certainty, stalking a seagull. The sun is high; it's almost noon. Is she five, six? I don't know. I'm not good at details. The seagull opens its wings and takes flight; and the small girl whirls to face the sky, an upswell of wind sweeping her fine brown hair away from her face.

That's when I see it. Two black eyes.

I steady myself. I look around: where are her parents?

I move toward her, smile, and kneel down. Between her eyes, on the edges of her nose, her bruises rise.

How could I walk away? How could I do nothing?

I walk across the lawn in the bright light of day, take the girl's small hand in mine, lead her to my car, open the passenger door, lift her into the seat, put the seatbelt around her small frame, circle the car to the

driver's side, and climb into my truck. It's that easy to save her. I put the key in the ignition and drive away.

Sophy Matheson is breathing quietly next to me now, asleep under the weight of my jacket. Now that I have her, I think, she will be the safest child in the world.

DAVID S. ROBERTS

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*The Rain and My Daughter*

I looked in wonder at my daughter's smile  
And thought, "How could she be so glad at rain?"  
I bear the weight of illness dark and strange,  
So rain is just so much of wet and gloom.  
I needed firsthand what she saw in rain—  
I can't be trusted, seeing life so coarse.  
She took my hand, inviting me to walk,  
As joy-drops pelted through our clothes and skin;  
Her lack of fear and unremitting joy  
Became the smile that I had lost till then.  
So much is better when a stormy day  
Has power to make her laugh and chase away  
My worries: powerless phantoms scared of rain.



*Convocation*

Ginger glows warmly;  
burning my throat with  
the searing stain of  
intermittent crimson  
sighs; awash in the  
bittersweet confection  
of dying dreams.

Transforming liquid  
into form: translucent  
upon glassy shores.

Did your eyes just  
shine like ember  
glare, or was that  
love in sacred prayer?

*If You Could See Me Now*

Sunsets, sands, and seasons  
have slipped through my fingers  
and I've buried the tears I offered to you:  
rich soil blackening hurt, disguising the  
stain of crushed rose petal dreams,  
drowning 'neath the earth's lost horizons.

Many moons have passed since then,  
but on nights when the sky is exposed  
and open, an unclouded conscience,  
I let my mind remember  
...your face...  
...your touch...  
...your smile...  
I was blinded by loyalty and  
you were bound by a promise, unknown.

Yet as the veil unfolds, as reality melts memory,  
I see the difference  
between the girl of yesteryear  
and the woman of today.

My skin is still as pale as a winter's  
reflection ... but is softer to the touch.  
These lips once bruised and silenced  
have kissed the wine-red lips of love  
and smiled sunsets golden and mornings  
...unbroken...  
...untainted...  
...endless.

Your smile still shines,  
yet only in the darkest of corners:  
my best kept secret: unspoken.

What dreams do you spin?  
Do you hide in the dark of the moon  
or dance in its shining beams?  
Is your star anchored or  
does it blaze iridescent streaks  
across the ebony sky?  
Where are you now and  
who have you become?  
A life spent together was not  
written in the stars: your heart  
belonged to another and mine  
was seeking silently -

... but still I wonder what you would think ...  
how you would react ...  
what you would say ...

... if you could see me now.

*Silent Voices*

I was lost in a sea of silent voices:  
a conversation carried out to a song  
with an unknown melody.

Teach me the lyrics  
and I will learn to sing this song one day.  
Whisper your mystic -  
for I still have faith in graceful hands.

Secret names dispersed with  
the shedding of light  
now impossible to return to  
with the shedding of a tear.

Perhaps I was wrong in  
thinking I could help you;  
perhaps I'm still wrong  
for running away.

Sweep me away in the  
realm of these silent voices -  
complete with the wordless plea of  
...Remember me...  
etched forever  
upon formless lips.

*Marytha*

It's crazy, the story.  
True pictures of my heart.  
The seed that was planted grew  
into something of deep beauty  
with deeds beyond knowledge,  
good above any expectation.

Care, desire, and frustration  
all push the noble acts,  
blinded by self-importance,  
thorns choking it all.  
I forget to sit  
at the Teacher's feet,  
and utterly fail  
until the thorns are  
removed.  
Where are the loppers?

*Ballerinas, Rainbows, and Puppies*

Mist from my breath fogs up the cold window. I rub it away with my sleeve even though there is nothing to see except a cold, dreary day. The buildings of downtown Edenboro go by in a blur of grey. Everything is so drab here. Either the dark green of pine trees or the ugly gray brown of concrete buildings. Mix the dirty patches of snow and mud everywhere and you've got yourself a truly godforsaken place. Why I agreed to come I don't know. Oh wait...I didn't have a choice.

The hot air grows uncomfortable on my face and I nudge the vent closed with the toe of my boot. I glare at them resentfully. I hate shoes and I couldn't go barefoot outside any more. More than likely my toes would fall off from the cold if I attempted to.

We pull up to a large log cabin store. A sign proclaims it "Paw-paw and MawMaw's Store." How quaint. The town is so small it didn't even have a pound or pet store. Instead "Paw" and "Maw" sold litters of strays and orphans out of their little grocery store. Doesn't seem quite right to me. They profit off of other people's cruel pet abandonment. My dad had heard from the owner that a litter of random puppies had been dropped off if we were interested. I wasn't.

"They're a fine bunch of young pups. Ma and Pa even started house training them." My father had said over dinner one night in the first week I had been here. I hadn't replied. Dinner was always an awkward affair for us. At least he could cook—I'd give him that. "You'll have some company over break while I'm at work. Heck with all the time you have you could even teach it tricks and stuff! Or at least house training it before you start school again." I had no intentions of teaching a dog "stuff." I don't think he realizes how much I enjoy the peace and quiet of the house when he's gone. He tried sending me to a neighbor's house the first week but the inane chatter of people I don't even know nearly drove me crazy. Besides the old lady smelled funny and kept trying to feed me stale cake that could have broken one of my teeth. She was always yammering on about her cats, and I hate cats. By myself in the house I don't have to pretend everything is okay so that he doesn't send me to a therapist.

The car door slams. I contemplate locking myself in and refus-

ing to get out. I realize that would probably hurt my father's feelings. As much as I don't want to be here, he is trying his hardest for me. Resigned to that fact, I get out of the car. Into an icy puddle. I glare at the offending puddle. Of course the puddle is unaffected by this show of emotion and icy water creeps up my jean leg. Maybe if I stand here long enough I could catch hypothermia and die. I contemplate death by hypothermia.

"You coming?" My father's anxious face peers from the front door of the store. "You don't want to catch hypothermia and die," he jokes. Oh, the irony. I walk to the door, trying to take care so that my pant leg doesn't come in contact with too much of my skin. I'm not ready to die I decide. And when I am, it will be in a place and way of my own choosing not by hypothermia in this godforsaken place.

The bell over the door chimes. It reminds me of a jewelry box my mom used to have. It sat on her dresser. It was a wooden box with flowers painted on the lid. When you opened it up, music would play and a little crystal ballerina would spin around and around. When the afternoon sun hit it just so, it would sparkle, throwing rainbows around the room. My mom would squeal with delight and chase them around the room calling me to join her. She said that if you could catch one then a fairy would come to you and grant you all your wishes. I hated the game. Every time, I wanted to tell her that you were supposed to follow a rainbow to its end and then you would find a leprechaun with his pot of gold. That's what the other kids said at least. I didn't know if I believed that any more than the fairy story. I never said this to her of course. I had to take care of her.

Her enthusiasm sometimes would catch up with me though and I would find myself running around the room with her, trying desperately to grab hold of the sparkling rays of light. We would collapse on the bed breathless and watch as the rainbows danced and teased us.

"Maybe we didn't believe hard enough." She would say.

"Maybe."

"Next time maybe?" She would always ask.

I wanted to scream out that it was physically impossible to catch spectrums of light in our hands. That's what our science teacher said at least. I asked her, just in case there was some sort of hope for that sort of thing. The other kids laughed at me. But I didn't say that. I had to take care of her. "Next time," I would say pretending confidence and belief. "Next time we'll catch one." We never did.

The store smells funny. Like sour cream when it has been left

out of the fridge too long. "Maw" tries to engage me in conversation while my father is picking up some groceries. I ignore her. This is one of those towns that every word that comes out of my mouth would be broadcasted to every single inhabitant. It's none of their business.

The day the doctor told me the news, I didn't cry. I ran home. I ran to my mom's room. I spent hours chasing the rainbows desperate to catch one, desperate to believe—to believe anything if I could have just one wish—one wish that would make it all better. I couldn't catch one—no matter how hard I tried believing. In frustration and anger, I picked up the jewelry box and smashed it to the floor. The box itself was hardly damaged, just a hinge wrenched off, not allowing the lid to shut properly. But the crystal—the crystal ballerina shattered into pieces. A thousand splintered rainbows exploded into the room reflecting on the walls, ceiling and...myself.

The whining of the dogs meets my ears. I follow it to the back of the store where a small pen is set up. A little golden ball of fur huddles in a corner of the pen. The rest, all dark fuzzy things tumble and play with each other. My mind automatically rebels against the idea of taking the outcast. How cliché. The storekeeper is speaking, telling where the dogs came from. Against my will the words pop out: "And that one?" I gesture to the corner puppy. The storekeeper's face softens. "Its mom had cancer. The owners didn't have the money for medicine so they put her down."

My throat closes up. I turn away from the pen. "I don't want a stupid dog," I inform my father and go to wait in the truck.

A few days after I arrived here, my grandmother Ruthie had come over. I overheard her talking with my father in the kitchen, yelling, more like it. "That child doesn't belong here. Nothing but trouble will come of keeping that child. Send it away to a boarding school or orphanage." She hadn't approved of my mother, or me. She hadn't wanted my father to marry my mom; she said that mom had too many problems. It was probably true, but I took care of mom and gave her the meds when she needed them. And my father had loved my mother. It wasn't his fault that she left him. It wasn't any of Ruthie's business. I put dirt in her soup that night. She avoided the house after that.

Dinner was just as awkward as other nights, if not more so. An elephant sat in the corner. An elephant that whined and barked and pissed on the floor. An elephant that did not belong in this house. I had refused to speak to my father ever since he had brought the little outcast



in. I certainly wasn't going to take care of the thing. After dinner I clean up the kitchen while my father sits at the table and reads the newspaper. The puppy runs under my feet as I step towards the trash can, tripping me up and nearly causing me to drop the plates. I kick it out of my way in anger and frustration. It runs from the kitchen yelping. My father gazes at me in astonishment. I open my mouth to explain myself but can't find any words. Instead, I leave the kitchen, put the dishes down, and go up to the safety of my room. I curl up in a ball on my bed and cry myself to sleep, missing my mother.

The dumb dog begins whining around 4 in the morning. It wouldn't have bothered me normally except I feel sort of bad for kicking it. That fact wouldn't have bothered me two weeks ago when I first got here, but I was going soft all of a sudden. I mean, the puppy didn't mean to get in my way. And its mother had just died. Like mine. I didn't have to be a Grandma Ruthie and kick a puppy while it's down. Dad is a heavy sleeper, and I know it won't wake him up. I ignore the crying for twenty-three minutes and finally give it up. I stub my toe on the banister and curse out loud. The whining stops momentarily but begins again anew.

I turn the kitchen light on. The puppy comes running to the gate and jumps up on it, gazing at me trustingly. Why isn't it afraid of me? I growl at the dog and kick the gate. Unfortunately it is with the stubbed toe, and I find myself on the floor cradling my foot. I feel something warm and wet nudge my leg. The stupid puppy is licking me through the gate.

I glare at it. It continues snuffling and nuzzling towards me, its little black nose poking through the gate.

The day that I broke the ballerina my father flew in from Edenboro to take me back with him. He helped me gather the pieces into a bright blue bowl. He held me tight and said that it would be alright. He didn't have to take me in. I still have the pieces and the bowl. It sits on the ledge of my window. When the morning sun hits it, it throws rainbows into my room.

The gate crashes down suddenly scaring us both. The puppy comes bounding over and creeps into my lap, jumping up to lick the tears from my face. "I won't be my grandmother," I whisper softly and sweep the puppy up in my arms, clutching him close to me. "I won't." We curl up on my bed, that puppy and I. We fall asleep watching as the sun comes into the room and brings it alive with the colors of the rainbow.

*The Universal Game*

This morning I heard the neighbor  
boys playing war in the woods,  
Ricochet shouts reminded me of  
Vic and Zach playing at war twenty-five  
years ago. A squad of ten-year-old  
subdivision soldiers wore uniforms  
of T-shirts and jeans, Converse sneakers.  
Some of the troops wore camouflage,  
some a father's cast-off olive drab.

A vacant cul-de-sac lot, territory in flux,  
Dirt dumped between trees, bunkered  
between various stages of fallen timber,  
formed clay dunes for defense.  
Warriors jumped the fortification,  
skidded into boy-dug trenches for shelter.  
Some had toy guns, most picked up  
sticks and chanted, "Ate-ate-ate-ate-ate-  
gotcha!" The play-victim fell to his  
knees, lay flat for thirty seconds  
before joining the fray again.

It was the beauty of the game: no  
bullets exploding in vital organs,  
no land mine shrapnel penetrating  
a skull, no amputations.  
I wonder who the enemy was.

When the soldiers got thirsty, they came  
to the kitchen for apple juice; skinned  
knees brought them, sweaty and dusty,  
to my bathroom trauma center for Band-aids;

Hostess cupcakes and Flintstone cartoons  
were served during ceasefire. At the end  
of the battle, they slept a serene sleep  
in their beds. Such peace allowed warplay.

I had forgotten about the war of  
Colony Woods in '84, boys playing  
the universal game. Those boys grew up,  
but the game continues next door.  
Toy soldiers still rise after thirty seconds.  
They get thirsty, scratched, tired;  
there is still in beauty in that.  
I wonder who the enemy is.

*Early Morning*

Walking out this early morning,  
I felt the night's rain seeping  
softly into dry red clay.

I stepped into a puddle  
and caught the attention of a doe  
strolling the edge of the yard.

When I saw her, I fell still  
as she. Splashing droplets held  
mid-air. We surveyed one another.

Not liking what she saw,  
she made a graceful lunge  
into the woods,

leaving me inadequate.

TRUDY ROTH

---

*Rex Billiard Hall, 14th Street Series*



BRAD LAIL

---

*English Teapot*



LAUREN BILYEU

---

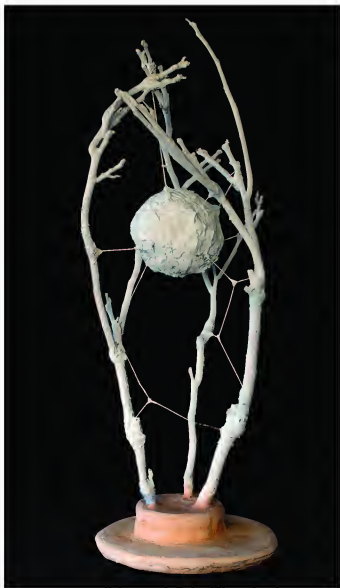
*Litter Landscape I*



STEVEN CALABRESE

---

*Vessel I*





KELLY LEARNED

---

*Teapot*



JONATHAN LOGAN

---

*Skull*



NIKKI RAYE RICE

---

*Gesture Drawing*



SARAJANE BURROUGHS

---

*Daisies*



*Writing Assignment*

Write your mind  
About  
The rape of the land  
War and Peace  
Death and Life

Write your heart  
About  
Icebergs melting  
Love and Hate  
Life and Death

Write your truth  
Different from other's  
And yesterday's  
What is real changes  
Through time and the experiences  
Of the mind and heart

SARAJANE BURROUGHS

---

*Blue Eyes*

The mirror has proved cruel  
in the last few years. Age,  
never seems to come gracefully.  
Her eyes look over the cracked edges  
of her skin. The wrinkles,  
that will never fade now cover her.  
Youth is what she's been holding onto,  
with the same arms that held her lovers  
in the past. Well,  
they loved her for a time.

With each bruise and broken bone,  
came another, "I'll always love you."  
Words made void by another's beautiful face.  
With every abandonment came another insecurity.  
Leading her to more and more lovers,  
attempting to fill the emptiness  
the previous left behind.

Finally, an empty shell of a woman,  
with nothing to reach for except  
the days before her loss of innocence;  
she walks alone.  
Her head down as to not make eye contact  
with better more respectable men and women.

But, if she'd just look up they'd see it.  
Right there,  
in those big blue eyes,  
the very ones that moved men  
to love her at first sight.  
For, they've not aged a day.

*I Am*

I am

An old football jersey  
surrounded by business suits  
and trendy dresses.  
An ugly duckling  
in a room full of swans.  
An independent woman  
encompassed by "cute couples"  
and perfect housewives.  
An old pair of jeans  
with holes in the knees  
because they've been worn so much.  
In a closet with Gucci, Fendi, and Prada.  
The girl next door, living with the girls of your dreams.  
"Just one of the guys," playing in a field of lovely women.  
A piece of the south wandering around in this big city.

I am

A fiery redhead  
walking with beautiful blondes  
and classic brunettes.  
Porcelain skin  
in a world that values a glowing tan.  
Soft and voluptuous  
when what they want are rock hard abs.

I am

Dancing in the street  
while others walk a straight path.  
A venti caramel frappuccino with extra whip cream

on a menu with decaf, sugar-free, no-fat lattes.  
A loud laugh  
in a room full of polite giggles.

I am

Freedom among the chains,  
one with life among the dead,  
one with hope among hopelessness,  
joy among angst,  
a smile among frowns,  
a carrier of light among the darkness.

I am here,  
and I am free.



*Terpsichore*

Night masked the town.  
I drove you to the dance  
at the school cafeteria—  
so many changes and questions  
in those middle school years  
when classmates struggled  
with whom they'd become.  
I headed back home  
to write a poem that spilled  
like music.  
Green ink  
flowed onto the margins  
of the paper. The pen  
glided without resistance,  
a dancer on paper.  
When returning, I saw  
you move like ink,  
fluid aspiring to be  
the best dancer in the place;  
such unending joy  
I felt, watching  
the dance relinquish  
its dulcet clutch.  
I drove us home  
where happiness sprang  
to dance,  
to venture,  
to resonate  
in winter's night.

LENARD D. MOORE

---

*In This Photograph*

If the sycamore could speak,  
perhaps it would tell me  
more than the gold burst  
of autumn leaves.  
If I could glide like a specter  
into the landscape,  
I would sit beside the couple,  
coat-wearing, hat-shielded couple  
on fence-like bench,  
blue sky peeking through branches  
over ripples of conversation,  
leaves scampering like children  
beyond fence, curved  
and cutting through the park.  
If the sycamore could speak,  
it might tell you  
I'm walking the road  
that loops like language  
from man to woman,  
woman to man.  
I don't know how to exit  
this gleaming landscape  
nor do I want to.

JOANNIS LAWLOR

---

*Uncertain Ending*

Two thoughts at conflict in my heart and head  
They wage a war, neither is ahead  
My heart longs much for the days of old  
When a knight in shining armor would complete my soul  
But my head logically states  
A fine independent woman you would make  
The outcome is yet unknown,  
All I hope for is that God's will is shown.

*A Shocking Story*

It was 3:27 in the afternoon. Time to check out. Mrs. Richards pushed her grocery cart up to the nearest cash register. The cashier was a teenage girl whose nametag read "Wendy." She was chewing bright pink bubblegum.

"How ya doin'?" asked Wendy, as she reached for the first item, a carton of eggs.

"Fine," said Mrs. Richards. She reached in her purse for her wallet.

"Ya know those eggs are on special. If you get another, the second one is half off," said Wendy.

"No, I didn't know that, but one carton is fine, thanks." Wendy shrugged her shoulders and went back to smacking her gum. As Wendy was ringing up the groceries, Mrs. Richards looked at her watch, a gift from her husband. 3:30. She was still doing okay.

"Umm, excuse me, ma'am, but looks like something's wrong. The screen is not workin'," said Wendy. She glanced at the register screen that sat frozen, not picking up the paper towels Wendy was trying to scan.

"Are you going to be able to fix it?" Mrs. Richards asked.

"Umm, I'm going to have to call my supervisor." Wendy picked up the phone and she could hear the cashier's voice echo throughout the store.

"We need assistance at register six." Wendy put the phone down and leaned against the counter. She blew a big pink bubble. It was 3:35.

A couple minutes later a middle-aged man walked up to the register, his tie identifying him as the manager.

"What seems to be the problem?" he asked.

"The computer's frozen up," said Wendy. She started tapping her foot, mirroring exactly how Mrs. Richards felt. She looked at her watch again. 3:37.

"Hmm," said the manager. He started tinkering with the computer. "I haven't ever had this happen before," he said.

"Maybe you should ring me up at another register," said Mrs. Richards. Wendy had stopped tapping her foot and instead went back to leaning against the counter.

"Aha! I think I see the problem. It will just take a few seconds." But she didn't have a few seconds. It was 3:40.

"There you go," he said as the screen blinked back to life. He looked over at Wendy.

"It should work now."

"Thanks," she said and moved to scan the remaining items. "Would you like a receipt today?"

"Yes, please."

"Ya know, I heard about this new system that has a touch screen for a monitor. And all I'd have to do is touch the screen to fix any problems. That kind of system would be real nice and easy and I told Mr. Bridges, but he told me that those new systems don't work as well as they say. But if you ask me, he's just being cheap, that's all." Mrs. Richards was relieved to see the last of the groceries, orange juice, went through, and her total appeared on the screen. \$49.25. "Do you have a rewards card?"

"Oh, no, I don't."

"Would you be interested in a rewards card today ma'am? If you'll just fill out the paper work, we can go ahead and use it."

"No thank you," said Mrs. Richards as she handed her the money. She quickly grabbed the grocery cart and started to push it towards the door.

"Oh wait! Excuse me, ma'm, you forgot your receipt!" Wendy called out, but Mrs. Richards was already out the door. It was 3:47.

Mrs. Richards balanced the bags as best she could to unlock the door to the house. As she walked inside, she noticed the lights were off and she breathed a sigh of relief. She walked through the living room to get to the kitchen. The groceries were heavy and she was ready to put them down. She sat the packages on the counter then flicked on the lights.

"Where have you been?" She jumped and turned around. He was leaning against the cabinets in the corner.

"Did you hear what I said?" he asked coming closer.

"L...ah..." She started to back up until she was pressed against

the counter.

"It's 4:07. You're late." She could feel his breath on her face, smelling of double mint toothpaste. She remembered the last time she had accidentally brought home the wrong kind. He didn't speak to her for three days.

"The computer at the cash register stopped working, and it took a little bit longer," she said quietly.

"Where's your receipt?" he demanded. Her eyes widened with panic.

"Oh, I'm sorry... I think I must have left it at the store."

"You think you left it at the store. This is what happens when you think! Now what were you really doing?"

"Nothing!"

"Don't lie to me!" He slammed his hand on the counter behind her. "What did you do? ... Did you met up with someone? Hmm? ... What's his name?"

"I didn't go meet anyone," she cried. "I was only at the grocery store, I swear!" He stared at her a moment longer, his dark eyes piercing her. Suddenly his arms wrapped around her waist.

"You know I just need to know where you are, baby... to protect you." He lifted her chin to force her eyes to meet his. "Do you understand me?" he asked, sweetness in his tone. She slowly nodded her head and he reached for her hands, pulling her away from the counter. "Okay, sweetheart, you go fix us a good dinner." He smiled, playfully slapped her on the behind then walked into the living room. The living room still had almost complete access to the kitchen. He chose a seat on the couch, where he could see both her and the television. She put the groceries away and started making dinner. It was 4:15. Dinner would be at 6. If there was one thing she knew, it was that dinner was at 6. Breakfast was at 7, lunch was at 12, and dinner was at 6. She remembered the last time she had tried to change a mealtime. She had wanted to move dinner to a little bit earlier because her sewing club had changed its meeting time to 6:30. He had refused and that was the last meeting she had attended. "You don't need sewing anyway," he had said, "there's plenty for you to do at the house."

She spent most of her time at home, in their two-story house in its gated community. She didn't work and she rarely went out. If she did leave she had to tell him, so he knew exactly where she was at all times.

He would often randomly call from work, and if she happened to miss the phone because she was outside in the yard or because she was in the bathroom, she could expect his anger later. She had taken to carrying a phone around with her at all times. It was 5:45 and all she had left to do was to cut the carrots for the salad and set the table. She pulled out her cutting board and began slicing the carrots one by one, their precise rhythm only adding to her frazzled nerves. She set the table and by that time Mr. Richards had already made it into the kitchen. It was six o'clock. "Right on time," he said and sat down at the table. She served him and then got her own meal and sat down. The first few minutes of dinner were silent, until he started talking about work.

"Work was such an irritation today. The bank is really not what it used to be. The stocks are down and lending has become difficult... oh, but I'm sure you wouldn't understand that. You're really not that smart." He patted her hand. "It's a good thing you stay at home, dear, you really wouldn't be good for anything else." She looked down at her plate. When she was little, her parents had insisted on the best schools. They could afford it. She had attended the best private schools in New York and upon graduation was set on going to Harvard, to study law. Then she had met him, and suddenly her parents didn't care so much about school as they did about a fine marriage. She had suspected that had been the true goal all along. He had been courteous, then, if not distantly so, and when he proposed she accepted. It was what she was supposed to do. They had rarely seen each other until the wedding, just formal events. She had not noticed it then. She stirred her peas around her plate and kept quiet for the rest of the meal.

After dinner Mr. Richards would always watch T.V. while Mrs. Richards cleaned up the kitchen. At 9:15, it was time for her to take a shower because at 9:30, he would come upstairs. When she stepped out of the bathtub, she quickly put on her underwear and nightgown. She could hear him coming up. She had already run the bathwater for him, but when he got in, it was much too cold, and she had to do it all over again. She started blow-drying her hair, the soft whirl of the blow dryer filling the silence. A few minutes later, he started laughing. She could see his face reflected in the mirror. He was staring at her. "Do you even eat at all? You are much too skinny. I like women with a little meat on the bones." His eyes roamed her bare skin. She knew what would happen. At 10:05 after he had put on his boxers, they would get in bed and

at 10:15, they would have sex. She knew this would happen because it had been this way for three years, since the day after they got married. She couldn't bring herself to call it making love, because they never did that.

"You really should take better care of yourself. Nobody wants an ugly wife." The blow dryer's soft whirl did nothing to cover his words. His face in the mirror was smirking and her hand clenched on the handle.

"Your hair looked horrible today, too. I'll have to make a hair appointment for you. Though this time I'll have to go with you, so you don't make another stupid decision on a hairstyle." There was a ringing now in her ears, and the soft whirl of hair-dryer had turned into a roar. He leaned further back into the bathtub.

"Really, you'd think you could do this one simple thing right, but no, you can't seem to do anything." With his last words, she turned around for the first time to face him and without saying a word, threw the hair-dryer into the bathwater. She had never seen him jump out of the water so fast. The lights flickered overhead and the hairdryer looked lifeless, submersed in the electrically charged water. He stared at her, his breathing heavy and labored.

"Are you crazy? You almost killed me, you idiot! If you don't..." But she didn't hear the rest of his tirade. She looked at him for moment, his face beet red with anger, the water droplets running down his skin. And at 9:53, she turned around, grabbed her coat, and walked out.



GREGORY RAMIREZ

---

*Anonymity*  
*for Stephanie Corrine Ramirez*

Once the sky blushes from  
The sun's goodbye kiss

And is draped in indigo,  
The luau can commence.

Polynesian women  
Wiggle their grass skirts

As a breeze brushes  
Our lips, numb

From constantly mimicking  
The smiles of fellow honeymooners,

Not to mention the piña coladas we sip  
While stroking our shell leis.

You wear a sundress  
Bright as the fire-breather's flame

While my Aloha shirt  
Matches the darkening night.

Still, we sit at a table  
With complete strangers,

With no desire to stand out  
Any more than two notes

The musician onstage  
Plays on his ukulele.

GREGORY RAMIREZ

---

*The Concept of Awe*  
*for Scott Russell Sanders*

I have never seen lightning  
Split an oak tree mere feet  
From where I stand  
Nor heard a newborn cry  
In my wife's arms nine months  
After our love-making,  
But I get what you say,  
Mister Sanders, through  
The private history  
Your memoir provides.

I never would have guessed,  
Following your reading,  
That shaking your hand—  
Firm from clinging to  
A lifetime of memories—  
Was an invitation to a world  
Where your granddaughter piles  
Memories like old toys and clothes  
While your mother, before her passing,  
Allows hers to drown in a sea  
Whose name I have forgotten.

Closing your book cannot confine  
Your reminder, from one wordsmith  
To another, of my duty to make  
The intangible tangible and that nothing,  
Not even this moment when I hold  
Your book in silence, is mundane.

*Washing Off Mexico*

Water smacks my skin  
Like the sun rays  
During those hot March days  
In Mexico, mixing dirt  
Caked to my body  
With soapsuds soaked  
To my washcloth.

These wrinkled fingers  
That pushed a girl  
On the swing  
As she screamed, "Alta,"  
Rub the stubble  
On the cheek she kissed

While sighs escape these lips  
That spoke Spanish—  
Inspired, like Peter  
On the day of Pentecost—  
To the little brown boy  
Who I piggybacked

As dirt rose from  
The unpaved road  
We crossed to the church.  
With my bare back against  
The white tiles, I see the men  
Who sat with their backs  
To the white church wall,  
Whose frowning faces fade  
With each drop that runs  
Over my eyelids.

TRUDY ROTH

---

*The Bookmark*

This morning  
I looked out my window  
to see a bookmark  
in the mud  
under the back tire  
of my car.

A simple little bookmark.  
Blue  
With two white wolves  
on the front.

It was her birthday and  
I had no money  
for a present.

The bookmark was cheap  
But she laughed  
when she saw it  
as if it were the best gift ever.

The next year  
after she had left us,  
in her favorite book  
was the bookmark.

I used the dish towel  
to wipe away the mud.  
Only a little stained  
with a small puncture  
in the muzzle  
of the largest wolf.

And written on the back,  
Happy Birthday, Love Gert.

TRUDY ROTH

---

*My Waterfall*

Behind my house  
is a waterfall  
that flows gently  
over moss covered rocks.  
And that's all.

But it wasn't always that way  
in my waterfall.  
In spring and summer it was filled  
with limbs that were big and  
leaves that were small,  
trees that grew tall  
that shaded and darkened  
my waterfall.

It's autumn now  
in my waterfall.  
The water flows softly  
over moss covered rocks.  
And that's all.

NICHOLAS LAUGHRIDGE

---

*I Cannot*

With eyes that cannot see  
With ears that cannot hear  
With a heart that perceives the world  
In timeless wonder  
Painted in the colors of creation  
A dream that has always been  
Though not complete  
I write these words so  
My wordless lips may remain silent  
In defiance of desire  
No matter how simple  
No matter how pure  
It is stifled beneath  
The oppression of the past

NICHOLAS LAUGHRIDGE

---

*A Memory in the Heart*

I'd push and you'd fall  
I'd hold out my hand and you'd pull me down  
And lying in the grass laughing  
With everyone looking down  
Our young hearts would never know they'd be so far apart

When did this distance come between us  
We've traveled so far apart  
Now just a memory in the heart

Years passed and age fell upon us  
We turned away never to turn back  
We've each made our own paths through life  
We forgot that promise made lying the grass  
Broken by the distance that was between us

When did this distance come between us  
We've traveled so far apart  
Now just a memory in the heart

I wish we could go back to those simpler times  
When a push and a pull could make a promise last  
Are those promises still made  
And will anyone ever keep them  
Or does the distance still always grow between us all

When did this distance come between us  
We've traveled so far apart  
Now just a memory in the heart.

*The Gift You Can't Return*

Holidays are a huge deal with my family, and my family is nothing less than dysfunctional. Now, plenty of people claim that their families are dysfunctional, but I assure you that it all started with us. All dysfunctional tendencies aside, we love to spend time together, and it seems as if we look for excuses to have family get-togethers. They insist on celebrating every holiday from individual birthdays and anniversaries to Thanksgiving and Independence Day. Christmas, however, is by far the holiday of choice. I've never really thought of my family as dysfunctional until this year because I have never brought an outsider into the chaos.

After twenty-one consecutive holiday seasons with the Wilson family, you would think that I should no longer be surprised by the festivities and craziness that take place, but I'm not sure if anyone would ever get used to my family. You never know what to expect, but one thing is for sure, you better expect it early and be prepared for anything. Christmas starts in late October for my family when my grandparents transform their house and the small, two-acre tract it sits on into Christmas Town, USA. With more than a month to decorate and an unlimited supply of twinkling lights, by mid-November my grandparents' home becomes a hazard to drivers and the most probable cause of several epileptic seizures. By Christmas Eve, it's hard to distinguish night from day, and the half dozen king-sized inflatables, including Santa, the Grinch, Charlie Brown and his Christmas tree have the power meter whistling and spinning at record speeds.

No matter how dysfunctional my family is, there's something refreshing about pulling into that drive on Christmas morning. This year, I'm running late as usual, so there's absolutely no where to park when we pull up. Will and I have been through a lot over the past few months, and I'm really hoping that today will go smoothly. My family hasn't met Will yet, well my mom and dad have, but not the rest of the loons. I worry that this is going to be like taking a sane person into a nut house and asking them to fit in and "make himself at home." We end up settling for a spot by the street and begin to make our way into the house.



Grandpa has stepped out of the house and away from the football game for a smoke break. The men folk have also stepped outside, probably trying to escape the extreme temperatures and overbearing scent of cinnamon inside. As I approach the porch, I hear my grandpa talking to my dad, Uncle Mike, Uncle Daniel, and my cousin, Brandon.

"Whew, she's got it damn hot in that house, d'ya know it?" Grandpa said as he puts out his cigarette and reaches for another log for the fire.

"Yeah, I was startin' to feel a little sick myself... had to get some fresh air," said Uncle Daniel.

"If you're so hot, then why in the hell are you getting that log?" asked Mike.

"Gotta keep her happy... if that fire dies, I'm never gonna hear the end of it, d'ya know it?"

Looking towards the backdoor, I noticed that my grandma has stepped outside just in time to hear the tail end of the conversation. "Travis, be quiet and check on that turkey for me before it burns," she said just before realizing that I have arrived. Everyone said hello as I make my way past them and into the house. I looked back to be sure that Will was following me in, but my grandpa had stopped him to "get to know him a little better." This could end very badly, so I motioned for Will to step inside, but my grandpa saw my hand gesture and said, "You just go on inside with the girls. Bill is going to stay outside with the men folk for a little while." I should have insisted that he come inside, but I know how stubborn Grandpa can be. As I reach to open the door, I look back and notice my grandpa—he's checking the turkey, just like my grandma asked him to. I shake my head and think to myself, "Now, that is love." Will is smiling because he knows exactly what I am thinking.

Seconds later, I'm inside and everything is spinning. Maybe it's the cinnamon starting to get to me or just the fact that there are seven small children circling me and begging to open "just one gift." My teenage cousins have taken over the living room television and have just started playing *Dance, Dance Revolution*, which is causing the entire house to shake, including all one hundred and twenty-three porcelain Santas which cover the mantle. I've never really understood my grandma's obsession with those things, or the angels, or the nutcrackers, as a matter a fact. I guess she just enjoys collecting things.

The kitchen is now off-limits. Grandma is cooking every single

side known to man, not to mention the six different turkeys, each unique in some way. From hell-fire, habanera-hot to traditional-roast, original recipe, they are all delicious, but I've never quite figured out why in the hell we need six. So much as step into the kitchen area, and she attacks, "This kitchen is too small for everybody and their mother to be standing around in it!" The den is also off-limits. The oversized Christmas tree and unnecessary, insanely large number of gifts have taken over the space, leaving no room for anything or anyone else. What this means is that we are all forced to be in one of only three places—the living room, the dining room, or the back porch—unless of course, you are my Aunt Sheila, who is refusing to socialize with the rest of the family by sleeping through the day in my grandparents' room. She came out last year at Thanksgiving, and then turned right around and brought her girlfriend to Christmas lunch. Let's just say that no one was ready for all that. Ever since then, she has been pissed off at the whole family, especially my holy rolling Aunt Lisa. She still comes to family get-togethers, but only because my grandparents guilt her into it by reminding her that it could be their last. So morbid.

Slowly, I make my rounds and finally take a seat next to my mom at the kitchen table, which is barely out of grandma's protected cooking territory. All of my aunts are sitting at the table, too, with the exception of Sheila who is still pretending to sleep. When I sit down, I quickly realize that they are discussing Aunt Paige's peculiar obsession for men she knows she'll never snag, so I join in on the conversation.

"You just wait and see, I'm gonna marry him one day," said Paige.

"What makes you think that's going to happen?" my mom said.

"Why would you want to?" said Aunt Tracy, "Have you ever seen him?"

"Yeah, he's ugly as shit," said Aunt Terri laughing, "a little pudgy, too."

"Watch your mouth, Terri," said Aunt Lisa. "If the Lord intends for the two of them to be together, then His will shall be done."

"How would you even go about getting to know him?" I add. "It's not like you ever see him... he is a professional athlete and all."

"Oh, I've met him several times. I also buy tickets to the meet and greet events every time he's in town. And, one of my friends took

me to show me where he lives on Lake Norman. The house is huge."

"Oh, hell, now she knows where he lives... next, they'll catch her breaking in to sniff on his drawers, won't they, stalker?" said Terri.

We all laugh, but we know it's time to move on to a different topic since Paige is starting to get a little pissed off, and we've already sufficiently pissed off one aunt for a lifetime. Luckily, Will walks in, and I start introducing him to everyone which breaks the tension. I realize that for some reason I was more comfortable with Will being outside with the men; the women in my family are all crazy, and I know it won't take long for him to realize it. Before long, they were all questioning him—from basic information to nitpicky things about his life. Then, just as I feared, they started talking about addictions. It started as conversations about their own struggles, but I knew where it would lead. And, it did. Before I could interrupt the conversation to try and change the subject, they were asking him all these questions about his drug use, the arrest, rehab—I was so embarrassed. But, more than embarrassed, I was worried—worried that he would leave me after today.

Will must have answered their questions satisfactorily because they had stopped interrogating him. He had returned to the porch with the men, and I felt at ease again. Four hours later, we're still sitting at the table and had covered every possible topic from the neighbor's sex habits to Lisa's new pastor, who she thinks should be replaced, by herself more than likely. She's a little bit of a "holy roller" and the only person more holy than her is my Uncle Alan, her husband. They are so fake, though, and mostly discourage others from getting to know Jesus. The two of them insist on blessing the food before every meal, and it's not that my family doesn't appreciate that sort of thing. It's just that we would all be okay with a simple "God is great, God is good..." and their prayers are more like sermons. I guess they figure since the majority of my family members aren't, by any standard, Sunday regulars, they need to fill in the gap for us.

We know that Grandma's ready for us to come eat because she opens the kitchen window which overlooks the back porch and hollers. "If y'all gonna eat while it's hot, you better get your asses in here!" I wonder what Will is thinking. He probably thinks we're all crazy as hell. We are, and for that reason, I won't even blame him if he runs away after this day. By that time we're all famished, so no one takes their time making their way into the house. After all, we still have to sit through a

sermon before we can eat.

"Before we can eat," said Lisa, "would you all mind if Alan blesses this beautiful meal?"

"She's so full of shit. What if we said, 'Yes, actually we do mind?'" Terri whispers to me.

"Honey, go ahead and ask the blessing."

At that point, we know it's on. See, Alan feels the need to use the blessing as a way of reaching out to the heathen and recruiting more members of God's army. And so he blesses everything he thinks needs blessing, and then thanks God for everything He has ever done, is doing, or plans to do. He hits on all of the major events in the Bible—creation, the flood, and, of course, birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Meanwhile, my dad and grandpa are sneaking small chunks of bread off of the table in an attempt to suppress their hunger pains. Occasionally Lisa notices, and reaches over to smack the hands of anyone reaching towards the table. Several minutes later, Uncle Alan says "amen," and we all laugh at the fact that he's remember to thank God for everything, except the food. My grandpa interjects with "Rub-a-dub-dub, thanks for the grub," and not knowing how Lisa and Alan will react, we all just go about our own business of fixing our plates. Will grins, but is he trying to disguise a look of disgust?

After dinner, we all dig our way into the den and start to distribute the gifts. Will is standing back, taking it all in. I know he thinks we're insane. We probably look like a pack of wolves attacking our prey. Once everyone has a pile of their own and there are no more gifts under the tree, we give the green light, and in a matter of seconds we are drowning in a sea of gift wrap, bows, and name tags. Many of the gifts are horrible, but the more important thing is the idea, right? Just last year, my Uncle Mike bought me a pair of pajamas—Spongebob Squarepants pajamas in the children's size small. Needless to say, I couldn't wear them. Not because they had then thousand yellow sponge faces all over them, but because I couldn't get them up past my ankles. I remember how my oldest cousin, Lauren and I had waited until Uncle Mike left and went to the bedroom to squeeze into our tiny, matching pajamas. And then, it was so hilarious, that we decided we couldn't keep all of this laughter to ourselves, so we modeled them for the rest of the family. Regardless of the gifts, we have fun just being together. Even though I'll talk about how annoying everyone is tomorrow morning as

I stand in the long line to return the useless items I received with Will, the truth is that we all love each other deeply. And I hope that Will sees how important they are to me. They're crazy, but to love me, you've got to accept them.

"Maybe one day, we'll have a family of our own," Will says on the way home, "and our family functions can be as much fun as that one was."

"Fun?" I ask, "you thought that was fun?"

"Of course. I had a blast. Why are you smiling like that? Your face is going to crack!"

"It just makes me happy to realize how important they are to me. Crazy and all."

"Speaking of crazy, did you see the sweater your uncle got for your mom?"

"Oh, yeah," I said laughing. "She'll have that thing returned before breakfast."

"Ya know... family is a gift in itself."

"Yeah, one that you can't return."

\*\*\*\*

Three Christmas seasons later, Will and I were on our way to my grandparents' for dinner, when I asked Will if he remembered the conversation we had on the way home from our first Christmas with my family. When he said that he remembered talking about the importance of family and how he hoped that we would have a family of our own one day, I asked, "Do you want your Christmas present now?"

He turned to me, a strange but happy expression swept across his face and asked, "Are you?"

I nodded, grinned, and turned just in time to see that beautiful, sideways smile that I love so much spread across his face. "So, I guess you would call this one of those unreturnable gifts, huh?"

We laughed.

J. LAUREN FLETCHER

---

*The Man Poem*

He's got his shoes off and keeps b'u'e'n't his leg  
As he sits,  
    Legs—crXssed,  
        *Sideways,*  
                Feet hanging off the arm of the chair,  
Reading,  
    Reading with his  
        Glasses off  
        And  
        Black hat  
            *[which has become a permanent accessory]*  
    On his head.

The line from the Bradley's poem ringing,  
                                **Ringin'.**  
    "Carpenter arms", he says...

Yes,  
    This is *him*.

And yea, I know he was talking about Jesus,  
    But this man is  
His reflection—  
His crown,  
    His *glory*

This manly man  
With manly arms  
    And manly feet

That are so  
    Per-fect-ly beautiful,  
So per-fect-ly manly

This man,  
Humble.

**"I am just a man,"** he says.  
    "Nothing special."

And one day,  
    *Someday, when I marry,*  
    How I want my husband to reflect God,  
Oh, how I want my husband to have manly, beautiful feet like these

LORD says,  
    "How beautiful are the feet of them that bring good news."

Yes,  
**Yes.**

And without his glasses,  
This man,  
    He reflects,  
    Reflects,  
        Is the picture of a beautiful **God**

    Who loves me.

Who loves.

J. LAUREN FLETCHER

---

*Sonnet for My Father*

I remember that time you hugged me,  
Tears running down your face;  
You gripped my small frame so tightly,  
You were about to leave this place.

I didn't know where you were going;  
All I knew was I was loved.  
You told me about grace flowing,  
Flowing from the Father above.

You said to always pray,  
Pray for the blood of Jesus to cover  
The people that I love and lay,  
Lay hands on each other.

I don't remember much, but I remember this:  
My father hugging me and then entering Eternal Bliss.



*Big Brother*

My hands are tainted with the past.  
I have pulled triggers for pride  
and beaten and bloodied for colors and signs.  
I have taken lives for money.

I have pulled triggers for pride.  
I struck men and boys with fear so I could live.  
I have taken lives for money  
and provided death in the form of leaf, powder, and pill.

I struck men and boys with fear so I could live.  
I bound my weakness with bitterness  
and provided death in the form of leaf, powder, and pill  
and taught my brother to do the same.

I bound my weakness with bitterness.  
I have defined my manhood by fear and intimidation  
and taught my brother to do the same.  
I hate myself for doing it

I have defined my manhood by fear and intimidation  
and beaten and bloodied for colors and signs.  
I hate myself for doing it.  
My hands are tainted with the past.

STEPHEN BARILE

---

*Accordion*

My little brother Charles played the accordion.  
Every week my mother paid for his lessons  
From an old bachelor on Ventura Street  
we suspected wore a wig  
And polished his fingernails.

The accordion, a spectacular instrument  
Boasting handmade reeds,  
Rested in a case by the closet door  
Until taken out from the crushed-velvet bed  
And put to work -- hour  
Upon weary hour -- every school day afternoon.

My brother's desires  
To play the large box-like snake,  
A writhing piano turned on its side,  
A shiny red inlayed musical instrument  
Not much bigger than he at age 12,  
Came with a vision of himself  
In a gypsy band from Eastern Europe,  
Women dancers spinning in full dresses, or  
A swarthy Italian gigolo like Dick Contino,

Or being loved by the multitudes  
Dancing polkas, dancers endlessly spinning,  
And spinning.

The accordion breathed a great sigh  
Then pushed out music: Lady of Spain,  
12th Street Rag, or Beer Barrel Polka,

From the mother-of-pearl tone box,  
He would slip gently into those tones

At the end of a musical phrase  
Then slide smoothly into the next,  
A deep breath of the bellows  
An exhale of long sustaining chords,

Sharps compressing, flats expanding,  
His body swaying, countering the bellows  
Unfolding, one leg in front of the other,

My little brother, the red-headed boy  
Whose hair glistened in the stage light,  
His smile was half pleasure, the other pained  
Playing away like he was Count Guido Deiro.

There was comforting love from the music  
As we were lulled into the illusion  
That lost paradise was nearly regained;

Gratitude felt deep in our senses  
Of an overwhelming well-being from  
The sound of flat notes on the draw,

STEPHEN BARILE

---

*A Carnival*

*Painted on the Back of a Snack Trailer Parked at the Clock Tower*

The famous lion-tamer Clyde Beatty  
Sprung from the fold of the big-top  
Jumped into the air then bounded  
For the cage filled with lions and hyenas.  
Two porters in white suits on either side  
Of double-doors opened them for him.  
A dashing fellow wearing jodhpurs,  
Brown Wellington boots, a pith-helmet  
With a whip he cracked, and a pistol  
He fired, which caused the audience,  
A chorus of school girls, to gasp.

I remember the giant tent  
Of the Cole Bros. Circus,  
Canvas sagging as memory,  
With rain rolling off.

Three colors,  
Lines and stakes holding it up,  
Planted in wet ground.  
It rained that day,  
Which could have been my birthday.

A tent the size of available land  
Stood on the very place where the barracks were,  
Across the road from the County Fairgrounds.  
Home, be it briefly, for Japanese citizens.

A processing facility that took pictures  
Of fearful faces. Men, farmers and mechanics.  
Women, the good, obsequious wives,  
Children bewildered and confused.

Numbered them, took away their names,  
 At the last stopping place before relocation  
 To deep inland deserts,  
 Selected for remoteness and isolation.

Who knew when their ancestors came ashore,  
 They say, their Japanese kin might join them  
 With shovels and adjustable end-wrenches.  
 Wives with their spoons and mixing bowls,  
 Children useless to do anything.

Clyde Beatty snapped his whip.  
 Beside his gun, his whip and chair  
 There was no other incantation  
 To make beasts do his bidding.  
 Lions and hyenas uncurled their bodies.

The king of the jungle, the great lion  
 Jumped up onto the squat red barrel  
 On its haunches rose, clawing the air.  
 While our attentions were diverted,  
 The other animals could have easily attacked  
 The slight man in the funny outfit,  
 There were no bullets in his gun.

The lion-tamer opened its jaws,  
 Removed his pith helmet, tossed it away,  
 And thrust his head into the lion's mouth.

When he came away unscathed,  
 Bodies of the headless applauded.  
 The pistol went off several times,  
 I saw the flame from its muzzle.  
 Animals ran the perimeter of the cage,  
 Then it was over. The dilemma  
 Of taming wild creatures was over.

The lights went out  
Then came up again to the ring on the left.

The ring-master in a red tuxedo jacket  
Pointed to a gigantic cannon,  
Being rolled in. A woman in white tights  
Climbed down the blue barrel.  
Then with a boom she flew over the cage  
And landed in a net. Recovering,  
She rolled out onto the ground and held up her  
arms,  
As if to say with jubilance:  
I did it and survived.

On a morning when it rained, I stood  
At the back of a snack trailer  
That sold peanuts, hot dogs and potato chips.

I was fascinated by the simple lines  
Of a carnival painted over the yellow wall.  
Yellow the color of a canary's soul,  
Yellow of exaltation.

The long streaming pennants from the tent,  
Next to the Merry-go-round and Ferris wheel,  
Pointed in a certain direction. Away,  
From the clock tower which no longer told time.

STEPHEN BARILE

---

*Mission Photo Studio*

I.

A Tuesday, the street is empty of citizenry.  
The only photography shop within miles  
Of the abandoned city center is on the other side,  
In Chinatown, beyond the railroad tracks.

The old Bank of Italy building

--Constructed by A. P. Giannini himself,  
Who made loans on a handshake for immigrants--

Long abandoned, empty, and filled with dust.  
The windows are whitewashed. Just two doors  
From the corner of Tulare and "F" Streets,

The Mission Photo Studio

Painted in gold on the jewelry store display  
Windows angle inward toward the door.

The opening, an intrusion into the private thoughts  
Of the photographer himself, coming out  
From behind a dark curtain when the door closes.

A rat-like face--  
Slicked, dyed black hair, a neatly trimmed moustache,  
In a wrinkled shirt--from behind a television,  
A black and white set emitting moth attracting light

In the afternoon darkness of storefront depths.  
He is waiting, as citizens of this farm town do readily,

For his 3:10 appointment, one set of two passport photos,  
U.S. government regulation size, in color, for \$3.50,

While watching a novella on a Spanish language station.

A wooden stool,  
A green light to stare into. Please hold still.

The explosive flash, the white head of a bull.

In anticipation of leaving the obscure business,  
I'm leaning on a glass cabinet waiting to pay.

II.

On the walls and display cases  
Are hundreds of framed photographs,  
Multitudes of previous customers staring back  
Offering unspoken words of advice, recommendation, or warning;

A husband, a wife and three small children reduced  
To two dimensions;

A Quinceanera queen in a borrowed dress  
Trying to smile;

A newly married couple, a skinny groom  
And pregnant wife;

Tormented dead souls of ancestors in cowboy hats  
Behind glass;

Stalwarts, the obese, the infirm, insane,  
Mentally handicapped;

The lonely, the self-loathing, the shamed,  
Birthed babies in swaddling cloth;

Men of animal instincts, unashamed brutes, lame dogs,  
Wives with grizzly faces;

A listless mother of two fatherless children,  
witnesses to horrid crimes;



Grotesque faces of fear and catastrophe,  
Of one forgotten;

Scyrian woman of Sophocles or Euripides;  
A man in a black suit, an enemy loved;

A family reunion with the one found and fallen  
Into the baseness of primitives;

Two adulterers, a husband and wife, the unforgiving,  
The unforgiven.

How much can we know of one heart's story  
From looking at their pictures?  
How much love and pain  
Is reduced to length and width in a metal frame?

How much can we understand a deeper anguish,  
Greater deprivations and poverty,  
The crushing disappointments?

Terror of this violence appears on my face in photos  
Taken ten minutes ago, before I even looked.

III.

Brightness of the afternoon light overwhelms  
As I step into the street to cross to my car.

Two ragged men are engaged in a fist fight  
In the middle of the day, in the street.

One has the other down on the asphalt  
And is pummeling him with his fist.

The stronger one overcomes the weaker,  
Who now lies in the gutter, head on the curb,  
Taking the unrelenting kicks and blows.

*Grandiloquence*

If I were the phrasemonger or the gongora  
of which I have accused, then where is the  
sesquipedalian magniloquence in my words,  
the bombast, the balderdash, the two-dollar rant  
in my overlay of fancy tricks?  
If this were about cacography, then I wouldn't  
be wasting your time. When was a *belle lettrist* ever  
convicted of stealing rhymes?

If you think that was a mouthful, a jawbreaker of  
academic choctaw, then listen to this.  
I'll prove there is nothing lush of flashy  
when I pile on vowels to a paragraph already drowning in verbs.  
All the big talk in the world couldn't swell my head  
or make my prose run mad.

When I scribe my pothooks in drafts of darkness,  
I'm not trying to trick out frills or  
paint festoons in purple and gold.  
I'm merely puffing up my breast. Full of huckstering  
and burlesque. If you can't see this, then  
I suggest that you get up and turn on the lights.

If a long word should dare to cross my path, I'll cut it up  
in little pieces and feed it to the cats.  
Don't worry, this isn't serial murder.  
It's just the screeching of a lexiphant  
down on his luck.  
Why, only last week some sententious old hack  
accused me of wearing too much perfume. Said I was  
Barnumizing the air. Taking up too much space  
on the page. His grandisonant blow  
hit my ear like parchment, not the bomb he was trying to drop  
from some lofty height.

So let's be fair. There's enough hot air here  
to send seven beauties home to fix their hair.  
So there. Put that in your lamp and light it.  
You may think you're opening up the language, but you're not.  
You're only adding darkness to the night.

*Eulogy*

I can't be certain how old I was, but I was old enough to remember. There is something very dangerous about a still night in the Harber Household. If the frogs aren't croaking or the wind blowing through the rough leaves outside your window, you should be worried. Before my brain realized that I had sat up, I knew something bad was in our house. My first thought was that someone had tried to break in again. After I stopped thinking long enough to listen, I realized that the house alarm was not going off. Of course, mom could have just forgotten to turn it on and so, armed with my fluffy orange slipper and a bottle of spray deodorant (to blind or choke the bastard), I opened my door.

I tried to decide if I should quietly sneak up on the intruder or try to make a noise and scare them off. Various scenarios were running through my mind. I had already passed Ali and Emma's rooms and both my sisters were sound asleep. That was good but hardly surprising. The corridor along our rooms is straight so had someone been there, I would have seen them the minute I stepped out of my room. The corridor curves to the right by the shower bathroom which is just past Emma's room. I looked for Max – our cross staffie – but he was not at his usual post in his basket. It would take another turn (to the left) before I would be able to see my parents' room. I don't think anyone would ever be stupid enough to hide in our shower bathroom, but they might have tried the bath bathroom. There is enough space between the opened bath bathroom door and the wall for someone to slip into had they been startled when they heard me ungracefully traipsing down the corridor. (Yes, I did in fact decide to be noisy because scaring someone away before you find them is a far more pleasant option than waiting 'til you're on top of them). Anyway, if this was the case, then as I turned left after the shower bathroom, the intruder could pounce out from behind the bath bathroom door and kill me – leaving Ali and Emma defenseless.

"Hello?" (Maybe this was a friendly burglar – who just wanted to steal my tv.)

"Inger?" (Ah, relief – the mother.)

"Yes, Mom?"

"Why are you awake? Are you ok?"

"I'm fine," I said, walking around the corner, confident that any intruder, and therefore any danger, was a figment of my South African imagination.

Then I saw the blood.

My dad was propped up on their bed. From the light of his reading lamp, his skin looked how I imagine cold rubber must. The thin layer of moisture on it seemed too detached to not be alien. The green towel I had used for my shower that evening was now completely red and sat in a frumpy hump on the once white sheets. Another towel was wrapped around my father's head.

"Your father has lost a lot of blood. I'm taking him to the hospital. Can you stay up until I get back? He may need a transfusion. I already phoned Charlie, and he told me not to let those Zots give him bad blood – so we're gonna get some saline instead."

"Um...ok... How are you gonna get him there?"

"I'll drive. Now make sure you put the alarm back on when I leave, ok?"

My dad is not a small man. He most certainly was not at this particular point in time. This was before he got gout and had to cut out beer and most red meat. In order to get him to the car, mom had to prop him up. While she lacked his stomach, she had boobs which had fed three babies. It was against those boobs that Dad's head rested as he tried to move his feet – left, right, left, right instead of the left, left, left...and a right... that they seemed to prefer. Finally he lunged and she threw, and he was in the passenger seat of our Volvo-family-car. (I was still holding the orange fluffy slipper).

They were gone as soon as they were buckled in. Mom hadn't even stopped to shut the gate. It occurred to me that the gate and the front door being simultaneously open wasn't ideal. I looked down at Max who, seated next to me, was looking up at me. He read my thoughts and turned to trot back in. I quickly inspected the driveway before closing the metal gate and then the front door, hopping over a bloody footprint as I walked inside.

Once I was back inside, I went through to the kitchen. My mom is a fabulous cook. Instead of ordinary cupboards, she has a large wood-

en wardrobe into which she installed extra shelves. Digging on the lower left (just about hip height), below the teas and next to the spices, I found the large wooden block into which all the knives were arranged. I figured a bread knife would probably be too blunt. If I used the big chopping one mom used for parsley, I would have to swing down – which could be problematic since the intruder would probably be taller than me... Okay, so one of those sharp, pointy ones. Then I could just whip it out and plunge it into his side. I figured I should probably sit by the phone – that way, when Mom phoned I could be right there. Dad must be alive. If he'd bled to death, I would have heard something. I just needed to wait and she would ring. And everything would be ok. Max was right next to me and the girls were in bed and the house was locked and I had a sharp knife in case something went wrong.

The blood on the bed looked gross. All blood eventually clots and dries up and the pool on my dad's side had kinda started to do this. He's a hemophiliac so his blood struggles to dry up. It just seemed to cling to itself and only a thin layer on the top showed any promise of drying. The rest just sat there, all dark and full of my dad's life. I dipped the end of the knife into the goo.

I got to thinking about what it would be like if Dad did die. Like what if he had lost too much blood? Even if he came home and got better he could still die – plenty of his friends were dropping off from cancer and bad hearts. What would it be like if he got sick? Imagine if they couldn't cure it! Or worse they didn't know what was wrong. What would we do? Dad would have to lie here on this bed all day, every day. All he would be able to see is the verandah where we built houses out of sheets. Imagine if he got so sick he couldn't read the newspaper? Our mail and *Guardian* and *Daily News* would just sit on the dresser tucked around themselves and occasionally wrapped in plastic (if the weather ad been foul).

And Marion would come down from Canada to visit again, and claim back her Dad's-oldest-daughter status. And I would be charged with looking after my Mom 'cause I'm her eldest. Charlie would probably make house calls, once he'd finished his shifts, to check on Dad. So many people would come around to see him and crowd into this little room.

If Dad did die, there would probably be a huge funeral. So many people would come to pay their respects and tell Mom stories of how

he had left his mark in their lives – and she would cry her eyes out. I could probably say something at the funeral. I think something uplifting would be in order. Everyone is always so miserable at funerals. I could tell them about how when Dad had failed his final math paper in high school he had run away and camped in Lesotho for a month and was reported missing. I could tell them about how when he did his military service, there was a mixer with the nurses. Each nurse had to place her left shoe in a heap on the floor and the man who grabbed her shoe would be her date for the evening. Well, Dad was so scared when he pulled out a size 12 shoe that he tossed it out the window and for the rest of the night; some girl had to hobble around. I could tell them about how Dad spent a year traveling around Europe sketching the Great Cathedrals. Or I could tell them about the Virtual Cathedral and the Shembe Pilgrimage in Eshowe.

Shembe is a religion that incorporates aspects of Islam, Christianity, and traditional African Practices. In the middle of summer, Believers spend days walking national freeways barefoot as they sing. The climax of their journey is the ascent of a massive mountain, on top of which, there is more singing and dancing. Unmarried women dance topless, next to unmarried men who, dressed in traditional furs and armed with spears and cow hide shields, imitate the battles of King Shaka. The crowds sway back and forth in the waxy heat of the sun and the simultaneous beat of the drums and feet against the African Soil.

Marion and I had been walking along looking for Dad when we found a group of elderly women under the trees next to the makeshift village. The Shembes are pro-recycling (and often very poor) and so they buy sheets of plastic that would otherwise be cut up and used for juice cartons, and they use them for tents. Strung over two poles and a rope, the philosophy is simple: If it would keep the juice in, it will keep the rain out. Being married, this group of women did not go barebreasted. Which is a good thing, since motherhood and marriage is quite a load to carry – especially around the chest, hips and buttocks. I'd only done Zulu as a third language in school and was pretty rusty, so all I could remember was that a *church* was "isonto" and that *where* was "phi". I had no idea about the bit in between, which in English means *is*. But I figured I could just try...

"Sawubona mama, Kanjani?"

"Yebo Sawubona. Ngisaphila Ufunani?"

"Isonto....uhhh....Isonto phi?"

She smiled. I knew she knew that an umlungu like me hated not being able to speak properly. I mean imagine if I had messed up more than simply forgetting what "is" is? Anyway, she pointed us in the right direction and, thanking them with smiles, we kept walking.

Eventually Marion and I found Dad. He was dressed in cotton and barefoot. As was the Shembe Bishop. The two men were walking around discussing the design for their new Shembe Cathedral. There were approximately 20,000 Shembes present that day in Eshowe. However, when you see Shembe ceremonies in town, they sometimes don't number above 20. This flexible attendance policy had baffled Dad for a while. Then he came up with a solution – A Virtual Cathedral. The only definite thing about this church would be the half moon pulpit at the front. The rest would be left to the imagination.

Spanning from the pulpit, Dad wanted a number of dark, heavy wooden poles to be stuck in the ground. Had this imagined space been real, these poles would have been the stone columns that usually support walls and ceilings. Instead, these were the poles between which Tarpaulin would be wound to create smaller, more controllable areas or over which, heavy duty plastic could be thrown to keep out summer rains. On a nice day, it would be from these poles that banners would be hung. These banners would be made by the ladies of the church. Using rich, strong felt, these women would arrange thousands of glass beads into patterns and, ultimately, pictures that would dance in the sunlight and tell stories of the footprints, long since washed away.



## CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

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**STEPHEN BARILE** is a native of Fresno, California, and a longtime member of the Fresno Poet's Association. His latest collection of poems, *Here We Are*, was published in 2007. He teaches writing at California State University, Fresno.

**LAUREN BILYEU** is a senior fine arts major from Statesville, North Carolina. This is her first appearance in *The Broad River Review*.

**SARAJANE BURROUGHS** is a senior photojournalism major from Asheville, North Carolina. Burroughs has been involved with the Student Alumni Council, Student Entertainment Associates, Campus Ministries, *The Pilot* Photophgraph Staff, Gay-Straight Alliance, and The Dirty Conservative Poetry (with a Sarcastic Tone) Band. She has been inducted in the NRHA (National Residence Hall Association), served on homecoming court, and recently placed second in the undergraduate photography competition. She will be graduating in May and moving to Wilmington, North Carolina to pursue a career in photography. She will be married to Kyle Justin Case of Lenoir, North Carolina in August 2009. This is her first appearance in *The Broad River Review*.

**COURTNEY BUTLER** is a senior Spanish major from Hickory, North Carolina. She hopes to one day work an interpreter, either with the FBI or with mission organizations. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, writing, and hanging out with her friends. This is her first publication.

**STEVEN CALABRESE** is a 2008 graduate of Gardner-Webb Univeristy. His art was awarded "Best in Show" at the 2008 Student Art Show at Gardner-Webb University. He enjoys music, nature, philosophy, and making art, and is from Boiling Springs, North Carolina. His art has appeared previously in *The Broad River Review*.

**ELIZABETH CASHWELL** is a sophomore from Concord, North Carolina. She is an English major with a minor in Professional Education. Elizabeth enjoys reading, especially books by Ted Dekker, writing fiction, and watching old episodes of "Get Smart." After graduation, she plans to teach high school English. This is her first publication.

**KEVIN MARSHALL CHOPSON** received his MFA from Murray State University. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in the *English Journal*, *The Chaffin Journal*, *New Madrid*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Poem*, and the *Birmingham Arts Journal*, among others. He teaches at Davidson Academy in Nashville, Tennessee.

**THOMAS RAIN CROWE** is an internationally recognized poet, publisher and translator whose work has been published in several languages. He is the author of twenty books of original works, translations, anthologies and recordings, including the multi-award winning book of nonfiction *Zoro's Field: My Life in the Appalachian Woods*, published in 2005 by the University of Georgia Press. As an editor, he has been an instrumental force behind such magazines as *BE ATtitude*, *Katwah Journal*, and the *Asheville Poetry Review*. His poetry-and-music band, Thomas Rain Crowe & The Boatrockers, has been heralded by such icons of the music industry as Pete Townshend of The Who and Joy Harjo of Poetic Justice. As a translator, he has translated the work of such prominent writers as Hafiz, Guillevic and Yvan Goll. His latest book, *The End of Eden*, a collection of environmental activist essays, was published in the fall of 2008. He lives in the Tuckasegee community in the Smoky Mountains of rural western North Carolina.

**TERRI KIRBY ERICKSON** is the author of a poetry collection entitled *Thread Count*. Her second book, *Telling Tales of Dusk*, is forthcoming from Press 53. Erickson's work has been published by or is forthcoming in *Bay Leaves*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Dead Mule*, *Forsyth Woman*, *JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association)*, *Parent:Wise Austin*, *Paris Voice*, *Pinesong*, *Pisgah Review*, *Silver Boomer Books (From Freckles to Wrinkles)*, *Smoking Poet*, *Thieves Jargon*, *Wild Goose Poetry Review*, *WomenBloom*, *Voices and Vision* and others. The Northwest Cultural Council selected her work in 2006 and 2007 for an international juried poetry exhibit. Her poem "Bobbing for Apples" won second place in the Poetry Council of North Carolina's 2008 Ellen Johnston-Hale Contest for Light Verse. Her poem "Madison's Picture" won honorable mention in the North Carolina Poetry Society's 2009 Caldwell Nixon Jr. Contest. She also won honorable mention in the 2009 Lyman Haiku Contest. Erickson lives in Lewisville, North Carolina.

**CHRISTINE FLANAGAN'S** fiction has been published in *Philadelphia Stories*, *The Pisgah Review*, and *Burning Leaf*. In 2008 and 2009, her fiction was nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She currently teaches writing and literature at University of the Sciences in Philadelphia.

**J. LAUREN FLETCHER** is a sophomore English major with a Creative Writing emphasis from Midlothian, Virginia. She enjoys coffee, music, God, rock climbing, spending time with friends, goofing off, and pretending to be rock stars. The writers who have influenced her most are Donald Miller, Amy Sherman-Palladino, and Mark Schwann. She has been writing since early elementary school and has been published most recently in Manchester High School's award-winning art and literary magazine, *Mindscape* (2007), for poetry, nonfiction, and photography.

**KEVIN GRAYBEAL** is a 2009 graduate of Gardner-Webb University. His degrees are in social sciences and business administration. Graybeal was actively involved in campus ministries and the admissions office.

**INGER HARBER** was born and raised in Durban, South Africa. In 2007 she was accepted into the Georgia Rotary Student Programme and spent a year studying at the University of West Georgia. She finished her undergraduate degrees in English and political science and is currently back in Durban completing her masters in development at the University of KwaZulu Natal. Once her studies are completed, Inger hopes to begin traveling around the world as a universal cultural experimenter.

**BRAD LAIL** is a junior fine arts and psychology major from Cherryville, North Carolina, who is carrying on the Catawba Valley tradition of turning out traditional stoneware. He likes to throw functional pottery pieces like pitchers, bowls, and mugs, as well as decorative pieces, such as face jugs. Lail's pottery has appeared previously in *The Broad River Review*.

**JOANNIS LAWLOR** is a sophomore theater major with minors in American Sign Language and art. She is from Louisville, Kentucky. For fun, Lawlor enjoys reading, cooking, trying new foods, attending her Deaf church when she's home in Kentucky, and writing sporadically.

**NICHOLAS LAUGHRIDGE** is a senior English major from Gastonia, North Carolina. He enjoys reading, writing, and playing video games. His favorite author is Neil Gaiman. This is Laughridge's first publication.

**KELLY LEARNED** is a junior fine arts major and education minor from Fort Myers, Florida. This is Learned's first appearance in *The Broad River Review*.

**JONATHAN LOGAN** is a senior art major from Shelby, North Carolina. This is his first appearance in *The Broad River Review*.

**LENARD D. MOORE** is the author of four books of poetry: *A Temple Looming* (WordTech Editions, 2008); *Desert Storm: A Brief History* (Los Hombres Press, 1993); *Forever Home* (St. Andrews College Press, 1992); and *The Open Eye* (NC Haiku Society Press, 1985). He is the recipient of the Margaret Walker Creative Writing Award, the Sam Ragan Fine Arts Award, and the Raleigh Medal of the Arts. He is the Founder & Executive Director of the Carolina African American Writers' Collective. He is President of The Haiku Society of America. He is the haiku editor of the online journal, *Simply Haiku*. He is the Eastern North Carolina Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poet. He is a Cave Canem Graduate Fellow. Moore directs the literary festival at Mount Olive College, where he teaches Advance Poetry Writing. He is also Faculty Advisor for Trojan Voices (the MOC literary journal).

**LAUREN QUESENBERRY** is a senior English major from Charlottesville, VA. She will graduate in August 2009 to attend Loyola University Chicago's dual masters program of Women's Studies and Social Work. Lauren is a member of Alpha Chi, Sigma Tau Delta, Honors Student Association, Sister's Ministry, Gay-Straight Alliance, College Democrats, and the Dirty Conservative Poetry (with a sarcastic tone) Band! She has been published in *The Webb*, Gardner-Webb's Alumni Magazine, *The Pilot*, and the *English Channel* at Gardner-Webb University.

**GREGORY RAMIREZ** was born in Fresno, California, where he was raised and currently resides with his wife, Stephanie. His poetry has appeared in *Flies, Cockroaches, and Poets, hardpan: a journal of poetry*,

Heyday Books' reprinting of *Highway 99: A Literary Journey Through California's Great Central Valley*, and *The Broad River Review*. He has taught at California State University, Fresno (where he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in English), Fresno City College, College of the Sequoias in Visalia, and the University of Phoenix in Fresno. He currently teaches full-time at the Madera Community College Center.

**NIKKI RAYE RICE** is a sophomore English major with a creative writing emphasis at Gardner-Webb University. Her favorite book so far is *Slaughterhouse Five* by Kurt Vonnegut. She is from Hudson, NC. This is her first publication.

**DAVID S. ROBERTS** is an master of divinity student at M. Christopher White School of Divinity at Gardner Webb University. He lives in Rutherfordton with his wife, Anne, and daughter, Grace.

**TRUDY ROTH** is a senior fine arts major. She lives in Marion, North Carolina with her husband Skip Roth. She enjoys painting, drawing and spending time with her family. Roth is a Basic Skills Instructor with McDowell Community College. She hopes to use her degree to teach art history. Her work has appeared previously in *The Broad River Review*.

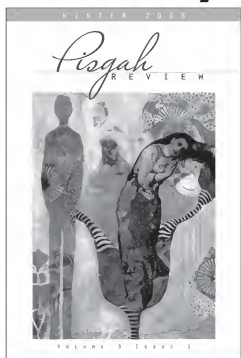
**ALLEN SMITH** has a poetry chapbook, *Unfolding Maps*, soon to be published by Pudding House Publications, and will have an essay in the University of Wisconsin's anthology, *My Diva: 65 Gay Men on the Women Who Inspire Them*. Originally from Durham, North Carolina, he lives in Alexandria, Virginia. His work has appeared previously in *The Broad River Review*.

**HAILEY SPEARMAN** is a North Carolinian by chance, born and raised in the All-American City of Gastonia. Raised as an only-child in a family too large and too dysfunctional for any shot at normalcy, Hailey is a very unique person, who has always taken great pride in her ability to break molds, step outside of the box, and break free from the chains of conformity. Graduating in August 2009 with a bachelor's in English education, Hailey hopes to obtain a job at an area high school and continue her education, eventually leading to a doctorate and working at the college/university level.

CHELSEE-CHO SUESZ is an English major with an emphasis in creative writing at Gardner-Webb University. She was born on the island of Maui, Hawaii, and her family currently resides on Oahu. In addition to reading and writing, she enjoys singing, acting, and photography. This is her first publication.

JO BARBARA TAYLOR lives in North Carolina, but is an Indiana farm girl at heart. Her poems and academic writing have appeared in *Mount Olive Review*, *Beacon*, *Bay Leaves*, *Ibbetson Street*, and on *New Verse News*. She is named the 2008-09 adult-student in the Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poet Series. She edits the newsletter for the North Carolina Poetry Society.

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